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The Rhetorical Antecedents to Vietnam, 1945–1965

Gregory A. Olson, George N. Dionisopoulos,
and Steven R. Goldzwig

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I do not believe that any of the Presidents who have been involved with Vietnam, Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, or President Nixon, foresaw or desired that the United States would become involved in a large scale war in Asia. But the fact remains that a steady progression of small decisions and actions over a period of 20 years had forestalled a clear-cut decision by the President or by the President and Congress—decision as to whether the defense of South Vietnam and involvement in a great war were necessary to the security and best interest of the United States.

—Senator John Sherman Cooper (R-KY), *Congressional Record*, 1970

In his 1987 doctoral thesis, General David Petraeus wrote of Vietnam: “We do not take the time to understand the nature of the society in which we are fighting, the government we are supporting, or the enemy we are fighting.”¹ After World War II, when the United States chose Vietnam as an area for nation building as part of its Cold War strategy, little was known about that exotic land. In 1941, for example, the government files on Southeast Asia contained one folder whose entire contents consisted of four magazine articles. Representative Mike Mansfield (D-MT), who would himself become a Senate expert on the region, confessed in 1949, “Unfortunately, I do not know much about the Indochinese situation. I do not think that anyone does.” Representative John F. Kennedy (D-MA) admitted in 1951, after a trip there, that he was “confused, as most of us are” about the problems in that foreign place. In 1954, no American books had been written on Indochina (the three French colonies of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia), only a handful of Americans were fluent in the Vietnamese language, and historian William Conrad

Gibbons estimated that fewer than five American academics had expertise on that region.²

Historian George Donelson Moss argues that “gradually, by stages,” American presidents led the nation into war in Vietnam. Harry S. Truman chose to support the French in their effort to maintain Vietnam as their colony after World War II. Dwight D. Eisenhower decided to replace the French in South Vietnam and commit America to nation building behind Vietnamese anti-Communist/nationalist Ngo Dinh Diem. John F. Kennedy escalated American commitment to a “small scale” war and, when Diem failed to live up to US expectations, had Diem deposed. Lyndon B. Johnson made the ultimate commitment to wage a major war in Vietnam to maintain the anti-Communist state American presidents had created.³

Touchstones in Rhetorical Scholarship

US FOREIGN POLICY RHETORIC

Philip Wander observed that the rhetoric of US foreign policy during the Cold War drew significant implications from familiar phrases like “defending the free World,’ ‘protecting National Security,’ ‘weighing our national interest,’ [and] ‘countering the Communist Menace.’” Wander characterized the discourse shaping the “early stages of American involvement in Vietnam” as largely a formal appeal to “prophetic dualism”—defined as “divid[ing] the world into two camps. Between them there is conflict. One side acts in accord with all that is good, decent, and at one with God’s will. The other acts in direct opposition.” With no middle ground to traverse, any compromise is viewed as “appeasement.” Attempts to remain neutral are a waste of time, and calls for negotiation are viewed as a form of “surrender.” “One advantage of prophetic dualism, for those in office, is that it stifles debate,” and “because it posits a life-and-death struggle, it encourages a heightened dependence on the established order.” But its Achilles’ heel is that it “leaves little room for adaptation or compromise.”⁴ This led to Cold War thinking, including the belief that Communism was monolithic and controlled by Moscow, the acceptance of the domino theory, and fear of “losing” another Asian country following the perceived loss of China. Congress acquiesced as the executive branch tiptoed toward a major land war in Asia, but the beginnings of congressional dissent started by 1953, and by the time LBJ committed American ground troops in summer 1965, that dissent had become a major impediment to LBJ and was picking up momentum with the public, particularly on college campuses.

CONFLICT AND IMAGE PRODUCTION

The stakes involved in this discourse were made more real when they would transmogrify from symbolic confrontations into tangible combat in which the United States would by both mission and design invade a nation to save it for democracy.

Rhetorical scholars have examined how Cold War rhetoric could lead to action in a tense, unstable, and particularly polarized environment. While ongoing rhetorical battle can rally a nation, it can also make it easier to go to war.⁵ These rhetorical contours shape and complicate the antecedent rhetoric associated with the origins of the United States’ involvement in the Vietnam War. In the next section, we provide a rhetorical history that is intended to highlight the many small steps taken by multiple administrations that led America to war in Southeast Asia.

Ho Chi Minh

During World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt strongly opposed allowing the French to return to their colony of Vietnam after the war. In a 1944 memo to Secretary of State Cordell Hull, FDR wrote that he had told the British ambassador to the United States that "Indo-China should not go back to France, but that it should be administered by an international trusteeship." The president added: "France has milked it for one hundred years. The people of Indo-China are entitled to something better than that."⁶ Roosevelt wanted a United Nations trusteeship, leading to eventual independence. At the Tehran Conference in 1943, Roosevelt's proposal had been supported by Joseph Stalin and Chiang Kai-shek, the leaders of the Soviet Union and China, but British prime minister Winston Churchill vehemently opposed it; the British had their own colonies to protect and were threatened by the idea of trusteeship. FDR resented France's collaboration with the Japanese in Indochina during World War II. After France's defeat by Germany, the pro-German Vichy French government cooperated with Japan; Japan recognized French sovereignty in Indochina, and the French allowed the Japanese military to occupy the colonies. By the time of Roosevelt's death on April 12, 1945, the realities of the postwar world were becoming clear, and Roosevelt had become more ambivalent in his support for Vietnamese independence. Whatever hostility FDR felt toward France, the United States needed it as an ally in European reconstruction and against Soviet military expansion. Further, advocating trusteeship status for Indochina while denying that status for the Pacific islands the United States had taken from Japan after World War II smacked of hypocrisy.⁷

Less than five months after Truman assumed the presidency, Ho Chi Minh declared independence for the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. A nationalist and a Communist, Ho became the leader of both causes in Vietnam. Moss concludes: "Ho had a rare combination of talents: He was both a skilled organizer and a charismatic figure, a visionary who gave expression to the nationalistic aspirations of most Vietnamese." The US Department of State was aware of Ho's gifts, writing in a 1948 policy statement "of the unpleasant fact that Communist Ho Chi Minh is the strongest and perhaps the ablest figure in Indochina," admitting that for the French to try to exclude him from any settlement in Vietnam would be dubious at best. Even though one State Department member recalled that everyone he knew who had encountered Ho concluded he "was first and foremost a Vietnamese nationalist," the United States was never able to look at the French-Vietnamese struggle as a colonial one because to most Americans at the onset of the Cold War, Communism and nationalism were mutually exclusive and Communism was monolithic, controlled from Moscow. Journalist Robert Shaplen saw Ho's independence early, writing in 1949: "Ho is the 'old revolutionary' who could become south Asia's Tito." American ethnocentricity meant that Ho often did not receive a fair hearing in the United States; as one example, in 1948, *Time* magazine referred to him as a "tubercular agitator," "goat-bearded," a "Mongoloid Trotsky."⁸

Born Nguyen Sinh Cung in 1890, Ho's history is difficult to trace, partially because he often used pseudonyms. Ho left Vietnam in 1911 or 1912 and lived in exile for the next thirty years. He was a seaman for a while, visiting both the United States and England. During World War I, Ho moved to Paris, coming under the influence of French socialists, becoming a leader among Vietnamese nationalists, and a founding member of the French Communist Party. At the end of the war, Ho presented the great powers meeting at Versailles with a proposed program for political reform in Vietnam, but there is no record that it was received, much less considered. Ho moved to Moscow in 1924 to study Communism; he spent most of the next fifteen years in the Soviet Union and China, preparing himself to lead a revolution against France. After the Japanese invasion of Vietnam in 1940, Ho

finally returned to his homeland and prepared to fight both the Japanese and the French.

Germany had easily defeated the French in spring 1940 but only occupied the northern part of the country, leaving a collaborationist French government located in the city of Vichy in nominal control. In August 1940, Japanese troops invaded northern Vietnam from China, meeting little French resistance. By the end of 1941, Japan controlled all of Vietnam but left the French, reluctant allies under the Vichy regime, to continue its administration of Indochina.⁹

Ho's nationalist/Communist group, the Viet Minh, waged a guerrilla war against the Japanese in northern Vietnam with some success. By spring 1945, Ho's forces received support from the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the predecessor of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), then operating out of a base in China. The Viet Minh also worked with OSS operatives to rescue downed American airmen. On March 9, with their military situation deteriorating and sensing that their French allies would turn on them, Japanese forces arrested most French soldiers and officials, briefly ending France's colonial rule. When Japan surrendered, ending World War II, Ho's forces were in the strongest position among Vietnamese nationalist groups, although their position was more dominant in the northern part of the country. The Viet Minh demanded and received the abdication of Emperor Bao Dai, who had served both the French and the Japanese.

On September 2, 1945, Ho declared Vietnamese independence. Using aerial photographs, the OSS estimated between five hundred thousand and six hundred thousand Vietnamese gathered in Hanoi to listen to Ho's outdoor address. Archimedes L. A. Patti, an American with the OSS in attendance that day, compared the arriving Vietnamese throngs to "bees swarming" in anticipation of a leader who was as unknown to the Vietnamese as he was to US leaders in Washington. As Ho was introduced as "liberator and savior of the nation," party members strategically scattered throughout the crowd started to chant, "Doc-Lap" (independence). Patti described Ho's delivery as "powerful" and "emotional." Ho began his speech by citing both the US Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen; journalist Stanley Karnow claimed that Ho obtained his copy of the American document from one of the OSS officers. The Vietnamese nationalist intoned:

"All men are created equal. The Creator has given us certain inviolable Rights; the right to Life, the right to be Free, and the right to achieve Happiness."

These immortal words are taken from the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America in 1776. In a larger sense, this means that: All the people on earth are born equal; All the people have the right to live, to be happy, to be free.

The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, made at the time of the French Revolution, in 1791, also states: "Men are born and must remain free and have equal rights. Those are undeniable truths."

Ho's words were certainly an attempt to convince the United States to support Vietnamese emancipation and meant to curry favor with any French sympathetic to his cause. Some have viewed Ho's introduction as a callous attempt to manipulate American and French opinion, although the OSS agents present that day felt Ho sincerely appreciated the ideals of both the American and French revolutions.

The Vietnamese leader went on to argue that French treatment of his compatriots surely did not live up to the lofty goals stated in these documents. Ho maintained that the French had given up any right to control Vietnam, ending with an appeal to the world community:

In the autumn of 1940, when the Japanese fascists invaded Indochina to establish new bases for their fight against the Allies, the French colonialists went down on bended knee and handed over our country to them. Hence from that moment on our people became the victims of the French and the Japanese. Their sufferings and miseries increased. From the end of 1944 to the start of this year, from Quang Tri to north Viet Nam, more than two million of our fellow countrymen died of starvation. On March 9th, the French troops were disarmed by the Japanese. The French colonialists either fled or surrendered, showing that not only were they incapable of protecting us but that, in the course of five years, they twice sold our country to the Japanese. . . .

For these reasons, we, members of the Provisional Government of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, solemnly declare to the world that Viet Nam has the right to be a free and independent country—and in fact it is so already. The entire Vietnamese people are determined to mobilize all their spiritual and material forces, to sacrifice their lives and property, in order to safeguard their right to liberty and independence.¹⁰

Later that September 1945, Lieutenant Colonel A. Peter Dewey of the OSS became the first American to die at the hands of Communist forces in Vietnam. The Viet Minh who ambushed Dewey in Saigon likely took him for a member of the French military, and while Dewey's name does not grace the Vietnam War Memorial, it probably should. Dewey's final wire seems prescient, if not prophetic: "Cochinchina (southern Vietnam) is burning. The French and British are finished here, and we ought to clear out of Southeast Asia."¹¹

During this period, Ho appealed to President Truman and Secretary of State James Byrnes through a series of letters asking for American support for independence. The Truman administration ignored these letters, and Ho came to understand that the United States would not support Vietnamese independence over France's colonial claims. Indeed, no nation recognized the new Republic of Vietnam after Ho's speech, not even the Soviet Union. The French Communist Party favored returning Vietnam to colonial status, and Stalin was more concerned with pleasing his French allies than Ho, who to the Soviets may have seemed a minor Communist leader who was more a nationalist than he was a Communist.¹²

At the Potsdam Conference in July 1945, the victorious Allies had selected Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Chinese military to disarm and accept the surrender of Japanese troops in northern Vietnam and the British to do the same in the south. The French simply ignored Ho's Declaration of Independence and worked with the British and Nationalist Chinese military in Vietnam to reposition their forces to reclaim their colony.¹³

The Cold War Leads Truman to a Deeper Vietnam Commitment

President Truman lacked experience in foreign affairs when he inherited the complexities associated with managing the post-World War II era. Indochina's fate seemed a minor issue compared to other more pressing problems, and Truman did not share Roosevelt's strong anticolonialist views. Truman needed French support at the San Francisco Conference to create the United Nations, and the French Communist Party was strong enough at the end of World War II to pose a legitimate threat of gaining power through elections; Americans feared that criticism of France's role in Indochina might cost French support for American goals in Europe. The administration

had quickly dropped the demand for a trusteeship and accepted France's reoccupation of the former colony. As a result, America's opportunity to embrace Vietnamese nationalism was lost. American aid to the French in Vietnam was covert at first, but the Truman administration supported France in reclaiming its colony and began to finance its war against the Viet Minh that would last for the next eight years.¹⁴

The Cold War heated up in Europe after World War II with the Soviet Union consolidating Eastern Europe into a Soviet bloc. In June 1948, Cold War tensions increased with the Soviet blockade of West Berlin. Then, in September 1949, President Truman announced to the nation that the Soviet Union had tested an atomic bomb, ending the American monopoly on that weapon. As journalist Robert Mann observed, this was a "staggering" pronouncement that "changed the essence of the Cold War and reordered America's worldview." The *Pentagon Papers* reveal that the Truman administration was ready to militarily defend Indochina by this time, but that commitment was later tempered by the Korean conflict, which started the following summer.

The US public's shock at losing the nuclear weapons monopoly would only increase several months later when Mao Zedong and his Communist forces pushed Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government off the mainland to the island of Formosa (Taiwan) and established the People's Republic of China. Mann suggests that the loss of the Chinese mainland to Communism "raised the stakes in Vietnam," and the focus of Congress and the public, which had been on China, shifted to the French colonies. *U.S. News & World Report* observed: "All of a sudden, Indo-China is out front in the power struggle between Russia on the one hand and the Western world on the other."¹⁵

Mao's government immediately recognized Ho's Democratic Republic of Vietnam (the Soviet Union followed suit) and extended military aid. The Viet Minh now had a powerful ally on their northern border, making resupply easier and weakening the military position of France. Reacting to the changed military situation there, the United States quickly recognized the Bao Dai regime, something it had been reluctant to do after the French brought the discredited emperor back to power. Secretary of State Dean Acheson concluded that Soviet recognition "should remove any illusions as to the 'nationalist' nature of Ho Chi Minh's aims, and reveals Ho in his true colors as the mortal enemy of native independence in Indochina." The Truman administration began to see Vietnam as pivotal to the security of Southeast Asia; it increased military aid for the French effort in Vietnam and for the first time, made the aid overt.¹⁶

As early as the 1946 election, Republicans had used the "soft on Communism" charge against Democrats. Richard M. Nixon won a California House seat that year by "red-baiting" Jerry Voorhis, his incumbent Democratic opponent (Nixon employed the same strategy in 1950 when he moved to the Senate, defeating another Democratic incumbent, Helen Gahagan Douglas). Republican presidential nominee Thomas E. Dewey was considered a shoo-in in 1948, when he lost to Truman after running a reasoned campaign. After the Communist victory in 1949, Republican kid-gloves came off, leading to what scholar Robert P. Newman calls a period of "scapegoating and witch-hunting." The Republican theme quickly shifted from a general "soft on Communism" charge against Democrats to the specific "loss of China" one.¹⁷

William Conrad Gibbons argues that members of Congress, particularly Republicans, were "troubled and perplexed" by the Communist victory in China. This led to the claim that the Truman administration had "lost" China, which became a dominant political issue in 1950, helping Republicans to make electoral inroads in that year and leading them to political victory in 1952. Senator Joseph McCarthy (R-WI) became infamous in these partisan attacks, once publicly referring to Democrats as the "party of treason." Senator Arthur V. Watkins (R-UT) later admitted that

McCarthy brought the country to “depths as dark and fetid as ever stirred on this continent.” Republicans weren’t alone, though; Representative John Kennedy said in 1950: “What our young men had saved, our diplomats and our president frittered away,” ominously forecasting that the United States must be ready “to hold the line in the rest of Asia.”¹⁸ The loss-of-China charges contributed to a Democratic defeat in 1952 and later acted as a constraint on the Vietnam policies of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson—it was no longer politically palatable for any Democrat to lose any part of Asia to Communism. Newman concludes:

Presidents Kennedy and Johnson were terrified at the prospect of losing Vietnam to Communism and thus suffering the same disaster that befell Truman because of his “loss” of China. Neither expected to *win* in Vietnam; they were content with continuing stalemate, since this would at least partially immunize them from right wing charges of allowing the Communists to take over yet another Asian territory.¹⁹

North Korea’s invasion of South Korea on June 27, 1950, caught the United States and most of the world by surprise; two days later, the Truman administration followed through on its plan to increase military assistance to France, including the establishment of American military missions in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. The Truman Doctrine of 1947 pledged that the United States would defend “free peoples” everywhere, and the Marshall Plan, which followed one year later, provided massive funding for European reconstruction. Both were based on George Kennan’s concept of “containment” of the Soviet Union. The Doctrine was used for aid to Greece and Turkey after Britain pulled out of those countries, to keep them out of the Soviet camp. Kennan himself had never wanted the continent of Asia to be included in a containment policy, but it was soon applied there. Gibbons suggests that the Truman Doctrine led to a “philosophy of intervention” that made it easier for Truman to come to the aid of South Korea and, later, for the United States to intervene in South Vietnam. The belief in monolithic Communism meant that American leaders never questioned that the North Koreans and the Chinese were proxies for the Soviets and if the Chinese would send troops against Americans in Korea, there was little doubt that they could do the same against the French in Indochina.²⁰ As Truman warned: “The attack upon Korea makes it plain beyond all doubt that Communism has passed beyond the use of subversion to conquer independent nations and will now use armed invasion and war.”²¹

Conservative Republican attacks on Truman over the fall of China soon shifted to criticism of his handling of the Korean War. Truman was criticized for not including Congress in the decision to go to war and for leading the North Koreans to believe that the United States would not react if that country attacked South Korea. The Chinese Communist victory over Nationalist China and its political impact on American domestic politics, followed by the Korean conflict, increased American anti-Communism, contributing to the momentum for an increased US role in Vietnam. According to Mann, the vilification of Truman over his Korean War policies led Eisenhower to conclude that the American public was not prepared for another war in Asia, helping to moderate his policy in South Vietnam; Lyndon Johnson drew a different conclusion; that it would be a mistake to go to war in Vietnam without congressional authorization.²²

Senator Theodore Francis Green (D-RI) pointed out the American dilemma in a Senate Foreign Relations Committee meeting with Secretary of State Acheson in spring 1950: “Everywhere the masses in these countries . . . are rising, and they are conducting what will ultimately be—it is a question of time—successful revolutions, but we are identified to those masses as being the defenders of the status quo.” Many Americans understood this, but France wasn’t willing to free its colonies and was

able to exploit America's desire to get the French to join the European Defense Community (EDC). In what Acheson later called "blackmail," France extorted the US for more military aid in Indochina to free French resources to help provide for the collective defense of Europe. By the early 1950s, the United States was funding one-half of France's war effort. The danger for the Truman administration was that France would quit Vietnam and turn over the responsibility to the United States, which was already fighting a war in Korea. France ultimately rejected the EDC, partially over the issue of rearming West Germany.

In late September and October 1950, General Vo Nguyen Giap, now the recipient of massive Chinese aid, including military trainers, led a Viet Minh offensive in northern Vietnam that drove the French out of most of the territory between Hanoi and the Chinese border; Joseph Buttinger called it the "greatest military defeat in France's colonial history" to that point. For the first time, the French military had lost a battle to colonial forces. While the Viet Minh victory was taking place, a joint memorandum from the Departments of State and Defense to the National Security Council did not recommend American intervention but said: "Firm non-Communist control of Indochina is of critical strategic importance to US national interests. The loss of Indochina to Communist forces would undoubtedly lead to the loss of Southeast Asia."²³ At a minimum, prevention of this presumed domino effect would now require increased military and economic aid, replete with additional technical assistance and capital investment.²⁴ The Truman administration was inching toward a military commitment to Vietnam.

Eisenhower and the Decision Not to Intervene at Dien Bien Phu

Before his 1952 election, Dwight D. Eisenhower wrote in his diary about the need to support the French effort in Indochina, but expressed skepticism about the likelihood of a military victory there.²⁵ Like Roosevelt, President Eisenhower assumed office with a strong aversion to colonialism, once recalling that in 1950 he "begged the French" to end colonialism in Indochina, to no avail. Further, Eisenhower had run for office on a peace platform and needed to quickly end the conflict in Korea; that would have made it difficult to send American forces to fight a different land war in Asia.²⁶

Eisenhower inherited the Truman administration policy of ever-increasing commitment to the French effort to defeat Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh. When President-elect Eisenhower met with Truman and Acheson in late 1952, Truman stressed the need for continuity in foreign policy; Acheson emphasized the importance of keeping Indochina out of the Communist bloc, arguing: "This is an urgent matter upon which the new administration must be prepared to act." Eisenhower was a staunch advocate of both the Marshall Plan and Truman Doctrine and soon made it clear not only that he was in agreement with Truman administration policy in Indochina, but that he was willing to increase that commitment. John Foster Dulles, Eisenhower's new secretary of state and most influential adviser on foreign policy, agreed with Eisenhower. In 1950, Dulles had admitted the difficulty of the problem in Indochina, and even though he opposed French colonialism, thought that the United States must support France, writing: "It seems that, as is often the case, it is necessary as a practical matter to choose the lesser of two evils."²⁷

In 1953, President Eisenhower's first year in office, he did not publicly talk about Indochina often. When he did, it was usually in the context of Korea. Truman had a deal with the French not to have a separate peace agreement in Korea. Eisenhower broke that agreement;²⁸ the Korean armistice was reached in July 1953,

and, as feared, this enabled China to increase its military support to the Viet Minh, further weakening France's military position. French public opinion had soured on the war; once the fighting stopped in Korea, it became increasingly difficult to accept the loss of French blood in Indochina. As a result of increased Chinese aid, Eisenhower was more receptive to French requests for increased support for its war effort. At a National Security Council meeting shortly after the Korean armistice, Dulles quoted Eisenhower as saying that a "solution of the Indochina problem was the first priority," more important than Korea, as Indochina's loss would "cost us the rest of Southeast Asia."²⁹

From the beginning of the US involvement in Indochina during the Truman administration, Congress had rarely been consulted nor was there much congressional debate on the issue.³⁰ That changed in the summer of 1953 when the legislative branch of government became deeply involved with the Eisenhower administration's request for \$400 million in additional aid for France. The views of many in Congress seem surprising when contrasted to their better-known positions in the 1960s and 1970s. Barry Goldwater (R-AZ) was elected to the Senate in 1952 on Eisenhower's coattails. Senator Goldwater is remembered as a staunch hawk over American involvement in Vietnam based on his campaign for the presidency in 1964 and his stance on the war after his presidential defeat, but like many in Congress in the early 1950s, he had a strong aversion to colonialism. Further, he opposed committing US ground forces overseas unless absolutely necessary. In his memoir, Goldwater makes no mention of his thinking about Indochina in this early period. But the opposition Goldwater expressed in his Senate speech of July 1, 1953, seems surprising in retrospect. The first-term senator, no doubt coincidentally, began his speech by quoting the same passage of the American Declaration of Independence as Ho had quoted in his own Vietnamese Declaration eight years earlier: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Goldwater applied that introduction to the French treatment of the Indochinese and indicted France for failure to grant independence to the three Associated States, that is, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The senator appears prescient with hindsight, especially his prediction that "as surely as day follows night, our boys will follow this \$400 million."³¹

Gibbons writes that when this bill reached the Senate floor, "for the first time since the Indochina war began in 1945, a very frank and realistic debate about the situation, and about the dilemma facing the United States," was held.³² Senator Goldwater wanted to amend the bill to make this aid contingent upon the French setting a specific date to grant independence to Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia; this was the first attempt to place conditions on aid to France for use in Indochina. Goldwater received considerable support from his colleagues, especially among conservative Republicans who were opposing a Republican president. But there also was support from liberal Democrats, John Kennedy, who had moved from the House to the Senate in 1953, favored Goldwater's proposal and offered a friendly amendment to soften the language in order to gain votes; Goldwater accepted Kennedy's more moderate language. Later, an amendment was offered to cut \$100 million from Eisenhower's request. Dulles was concerned enough about the amendments to get Eisenhower to intervene personally with some members of Congress to vote against them. Goldwater's amendment was defeated 64-17 and eventually, Eisenhower's full \$400 million request was allocated without France being required to set a date for independence. But Goldwater's speech and the ensuing Senate debate show that opposition existed to America's initial drift toward direct military involvement in Indochina.³³

In a speech to the Governors' Conference one month later, Eisenhower spoke on a myriad of issues, including his justification for spending the \$400 million.

The argument he used involved what in hindsight seems an extreme version of the domino theory:

Now, first of all, the last great population remaining in Asia that has not become dominated by the Kremlin, of course, is the sub-continent of India, including the Pakistan government. Here are 350 million people, still free. Now let us assume that we lose Indochina. If Indochina goes, several things happen right away. The Malayan peninsula . . . would be scarcely defensible—and tin and tungsten that we so greatly value from that area would cease coming. But all India would be outflanked. Burma would certainly, in its weakened condition, be no defense. Now, India is surrounded on that side by the Communist empire. Iran on its left is in a weakened condition. . . . All of that weakening position around there is very ominous for the United States, because finally if we lost all that, how would the free world hold the rich empire of Indonesia? So you see, somewhere along the line, this must be blocked. It must be blocked now. That is what the French are doing.

So, when the United States votes \$400 million to help that war, we are not voting for a giveaway program. We are voting for the cheapest way that we can to prevent the occurrence of something that would be of the most terrible significance for the United States of America.³⁴

In 1953, during the height of McCarthyism and the Cold War, few in Congress or the nation would have differed with Eisenhower's view expressed in this speech. As discussed earlier, the argument for a domino theory was first officially offered during the Truman administration, in 1950. Eisenhower himself had often articulated a belief in what came to be called the domino theory, beginning as early as 1942, and by 1953 virtually all government officials shared his view.³⁵ Many would continue to believe it well into the 1960s and beyond.

After the successful Viet Minh offensive in the North during autumn 1950, the war went better for the French. General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny infused confidence in the French forces, and Giap overreached. As the battle in the North for control of the Red River Delta continued, de Lattre's forces were able to reverse most of Giap's gains from 1950. J. Lawton Collins, the US Army chief of staff, toured Vietnam in late 1951, prophetically predicting: "This is largely a General de Lattre show. If anything should happen to him, there could well be a collapse in Indochina." De Lattre died of cancer in January 1952 and was replaced by Raoul Salan, who lacked the charisma or strategic brilliance of his predecessor. The Americans pressed France for Salan to be replaced. French public fatigue with what its critics called "the dirty war" had been growing for some time, and in May 1953, the French government decided to go in a different direction; military command for Indochina was given to Henri Navarre.³⁶

Navarre was not excited about his assignment, believing that the best the French could achieve was a military stalemate and predicting that in his new post "I've got 99 chances out of 100 of losing whatever reputation I have." Navarre's plan was the strategy selected for a last-gasp French military effort in Vietnam and an attempt to appease the Americans, who were banking the French effort; the plan involved increasing forces and a major offensive in the Red River Delta, but it never came to fruition. General Giap had made several forays into Laos, and the French were seeking a way to defend that colony. In late 1953, Navarre chose to put a large force in the valley of Dien Bien Phu in far northwest Vietnam near the Laotian border. The idea was that Dien Bien Phu would operate as both an offensive and defensive base, to block Giap's forces from moving back to Laos. Giap accepted the challenge, moving his forces to surround the new French base. Navarre did not flinch, choosing not to remove his military when that was still possible. Both sides knew that the Indochina

War was moving toward negotiation, and by the time the battle started, the great powers had decided, against American wishes, that the approaching Geneva Conference would consider Indochina as well as Korea. Both Ho and the French wanted a major military victory to tip the scales of the final bargain toward their side.

The logistical problem for the French was that Dien Bien Phu could only be supplied from the air. French strategists were certain that the Viet Minh would not be able to move artillery into the hills surrounding the French base, but in one of the most stunning feats in military history, Giap used more than two hundred thousand workers on foot, sometimes using bicycles, to transport artillery, mortars, and all necessary supplies through jungle and over mountains to the remote valley. Soon fifty thousand Viet Minh forces surrounded a garrison of twelve thousand, including French officers, Foreign Legionnaires (mostly German), and North African, African, and Vietnamese troops. Giap's forces were able to dig in the artillery and camouflage it so effectively that French artillery and bombing were not able to destroy it.³⁷

President Eisenhower had entered 1954 still on the horns of a dilemma: he was reluctant to support French colonialism but also unwilling to cede Indochina to Communism. At a press conference early in the year, the president admitted that "strange and weird things" were happening there; the military crisis at Dien Bien Phu, "whose name," Eisenhower conceded, he could "never pronounce," was captivating the attention of the world. At the National Security Council (NSC) meeting in early January when Dien Bien Phu became the dominant focus of concern, Ike said the United States "would not intervene, but we had better go to full mobilization" if France pulled out of Indochina. That position was tested as the situation at Dien Bien Phu worsened. While the president considered intervention, his instincts told him to stay out.³⁸

In July 1953, the United States had sent fifty-five US Air Force technicians to train the French in the maintenance of the American airplanes provided to them. To ease the stress on the French to supply Dien Bien Phu, the administration agreed on January 29, 1954, to send two hundred more air force technicians to service the B-26 bombers that had been provided to aid the French effort, as well as civilian pilots hired by the CIA, but rejected sending military pilots. This decision was taken without congressional consultation, leading to an outcry. Senator John Stennis (D-MS) declared: "First we send them planes, then we send them men. . . . We are going to war, inch by inch." Richard Russell (D-GA), the senior Democrat on the Armed Services Committee, called it a "mistake" that would likely lead to US ground forces in Indochina. By now a senator, Mike Mansfield (D-MT) complained, "Our advice is not asked; our consent not required."³⁹

At sunset on March 13, 1954, the Viet Minh attack on Dien Bien Phu commenced. Within the first two days, Giap's artillery inflicted enough damage to shut down the French airstrips, making it necessary for all supplies to be parachuted to the trapped French force. Eisenhower at least flirted with the use of US naval or air power, but was skeptical of the advisability of using ground troops. On March 24, for example, he told Dulles that he would not "wholly exclude the possibility of a single [US air] strike, if it were almost certain this would produce decisive result." Among the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) at a NSC meeting on April 1, only Admiral Arthur Radford, the chair of the JCS, favored an airstrike using disguised US planes with American pilots. But one day later, even Radford concluded that it would be too late for such a strike to change the outcome for the French. During the spring 1954 crisis, Radford and Vice President Richard Nixon were the major hawks in the administration—Nixon responded to a hypothetical question on how the administration would react to a French loss by saying, "We must take the risk by putting our boys in," which may have been an attempt to push Ike to intervene at Dien Bien Phu.⁴⁰

Dulles and Radford met with congressional leaders on April 3 about a congressional resolution that would act as a "predated declaration of war" (as the

Gulf of Tonkin Resolution did for President Johnson in 1964). Such a resolution had been discussed during the Korean conflict, but was never acted upon. It quickly became apparent that congressional opposition to such a resolution was strong. Dulles recorded: "The feeling was unanimous that 'we want no more Koreas with the United States furnishing 90 percent of the manpower.'" It became clear that the Eisenhower administration needed Great Britain involved if it had any chance to win over Congress. Interestingly, then-Senate minority leader Lyndon Johnson (D-TX) was at the Dulles meeting, and when LBJ reported what had taken place to four senators not in attendance, he told them that he "pounded the President's desk in the Oval Office to emphasize his opposition" to such a resolution. By 1964, with the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution under consideration, President Johnson would change his mind about such resolutions. But the congressional opposition in 1954 constrained Eisenhower when the French solicited a US airstrike in support of Dien Bien Phu on April 5; Congress provided the excuse for Ike to decline the request.⁴¹ Nixon recorded in his diary that, after an April 6 meeting, "it was quite apparent that the President had backed down considerably from the strong position he had taken on Indochina the latter part of the previous week. He seemed resigned to doing nothing at all unless we could get the allies and the country to go along with whatever was suggested."⁴²

On April 6, Senator Kennedy delivered a Senate speech, followed by a long colloquy in which many of his colleagues expressed agreement with him. Historian George C. Herring concludes that Kennedy "won praise from both sides of the aisle." JFK began by stating, "The time has come for the American people to be told the blunt truth about Indochina." That blunt truth, as Kennedy saw it, was "that no amount of American military assistance in Indochina can conquer an enemy which is everywhere and at the same time nowhere, 'an enemy of the people' which has the sympathy and covert support of the people." Ho and the Viet Minh were Communists masquerading as nationalists, but without political independence, the population would choose what Ho offered. While France had assured the United States that it would grant Indochinese independence, those promises had proven hollow: "Without the wholehearted support of the peoples of the Associated States, without a reliable and crusading native army with a dependable officer corps, a military victory, even with American support, in that area is difficult if not impossible, of achievement"—those conditions could not be obtained, Kennedy argued, "without a change in the contractual relationships which presently exist between the Associated States and the French Union." Reacting to congressional sensitivity to the administration's lack of consultation, Kennedy admitted that the proper committees in Congress had been "briefed—if not consulted by the administration."⁴³

Kennedy assailed the Korean analogy espoused by the administration and many in Congress that suggested the situation in Vietnam mirrored the one the United States had faced in Korea. The junior senator from Massachusetts argued:

The situation might be compared to what the situation would have been in Korea, if the Japanese had maintained possession of Korea, if a Communist group of Koreans were carrying on a war there with Japan—which had dominated that area for more than a century—and if we then went to the assistance of the Japanese, and put down the revolution of the native Koreans, even though they were Communists, and even though in taking that action we could not have the support of the non-Communist elements of the country.

Historian George McT. Kahin concludes that even though the Korean analogy was flawed and Kennedy exposed its "speciousness" in this speech, the analogy continued to be used to justify US "intervention in Vietnam."⁴⁴

Near the end of his speech, Kennedy pleaded:

if the French persist in their refusal to grant the legitimate independence and freedom desired by the peoples of the Associated States; and if those peoples and the other peoples of Asia remain aloof from the conflict as they have in the past, then it is my hope that Secretary Dulles, before pledging our assistance at Geneva, will recognize the futility of channeling American men and machines into that hopeless internecine struggle.⁴⁵

Kennedy advocated for “united action” early in this speech, an administration effort to build a defensive alliance for Southeast Asia that Eisenhower had Dulles announce in a speech a week earlier. Dulles’s speech had been intentionally vague and led to concern by many that the administration planned to intervene in the French war in Vietnam. JFK was among the worried, fearing that united action “is likely to end up as unilateral action by our own country,” and while the commitment of many nations would be desirable, Kennedy cautioned, “To pour money, materiel, and men into the jungles of Indochina without at least a remote prospect of victory would be dangerously futile and self-destructive.” During the colloquy, Mansfield asked Kennedy a “prearranged question” about united action:

MANSFIELD: “I wonder if the Senator can tell the Senate what he thinks Secretary Dulles had in mind when he was making his speech before the Overseas Press Club in New York recently.”

KENNEDY: “There is every indication that what he meant was that the United States will take the ultimate step.”

MANSFIELD: “And what is that?”

KENNEDY: “It is war.”⁴⁶

At his news conference the following day, President Eisenhower displayed signs that he was fully aware of Kennedy’s speech and the support it received from his Senate colleagues. The president referenced the domino theory in response to a question about the “importance of Indochina to the free world.” Eisenhower asked his audience to consider “the ‘falling domino’ principle. You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly. So you could have a beginning of a disintegration that would have the most profound influences.” He warned of a “possible sequence of events, the loss of Indochina, of Burma, of Thailand, of the Peninsula, and Indonesia following, now you begin to talk about areas that not only multiply the disadvantages that you would suffer through loss of materials, sources of materials, but now you are talking really about millions and millions and millions of people.” Ike concluded: “So, the possible consequences of the loss are just incalculable to the free world.”⁴⁷ Later in that same news conference, echoing the concern raised in Kennedy’s speech, Eisenhower was asked directly if “as the last resort in Indochina” the United States was “prepared to go it alone.” The president responded rather peevishly:

You are bringing up questions that I have explained in a very definite sense several times this morning. I am not saying what we are prepared to do because there is a Congress, and there are a number of our friends all over the world that are vitally engaged. I know what my own convictions on this matter are; but until the thing has been settled and properly worked out with the people who also bear responsibilities, I cannot afford to be airing them everywhere, because it sort of stultifies negotiation which is often necessary.⁴⁸

On April 23, in an address at Transylvania College, Eisenhower made specific reference to the critical importance of Dien Bien Phu:

The words “Dien Bien Phu” are no longer just a funny-sounding name, to be dismissed from the breakfast conversation because we don’t know where it is, or what it means. We begin to understand that in a far-off corner of the globe is an agony of conflict, where no matter how it started, has become again a testing ground between dictatorship and freedom, a desire on the one side to give a people the right to live as they shall choose, and on the other side to dominate them and make them mere additional pawns in the machinations of a power-hungry group in the Kremlin and in China.⁴⁹

This argument was repeated and reinforced on April 26 when Eisenhower, in remarks made before the US Chamber of Commerce, contended that it was “no longer necessary to enter into a long argument or exposition” regarding intervention in the region. The president averred, “No matter how the struggle may have started, it has long since become one of the testing places between a free form of government and dictatorship. Its outcome is going to have the greatest significance for us, and possibly for a long time into the future.”⁵⁰

On May 6, American pilots flying for the CIA who had volunteered for daytime parachute drops attempted to resupply the beleaguered French, but none of the material was recovered in the shrinking perimeter controlled by Navarre’s forces. James McGovern, on his forty-fifth mission over Dien Bien Phu, and his copilot, Wally Buford, were killed when their plane was shot down, becoming the second and third Americans to die from hostile action in Vietnam. Neither man’s name is inscribed on the Vietnam War Memorial. Dien Bien Phu fell the next day, May 7, 1954. One day later, the Indochina phase of the Geneva Conference began.⁵¹

The United States attended the Indochina phase of the Geneva Conference only because France insisted on its presence. Dulles left after the Korean phase of the conference, where he refused to shake hands with Chinese foreign minister Zhou En-lai. That left Under Secretary of State W. Bedell Smith in charge, but he later returned to the United States, putting the US delegation behind the third in command, U. Alexis Johnson. Johnson wrote in his memoir that he was surprised to be selected as he was not an expert on Indochina, but “I discovered when I returned to Washington that this did not automatically disqualify me, since none of my State Department colleagues seemed to have any clear notion of what we could hope to get out of the conference.” Smith returned for the conclusion of the conference, where Eisenhower issued an ambiguous statement, saying that the United States “has not itself been party to or bound by the decisions taken by the conference” but that “the United States will not use force to disturb the settlement.” The administration knew that the West got a good deal in Geneva. Ho had negotiated for the thirteenth parallel as the temporary dividing line between North and South, but the temporary boundary was placed at the seventeenth, causing the Viet Minh to cede about one-quarter of the land they controlled. The Soviets and Chinese pressured Ho to settle, partially to keep the United States out of Indochina, and Ho reluctantly did so because of the promised 1956 unification elections. Bedell Smith predicted Ho would win 80 percent of that vote; Volney Hurd of the *Christian Science Monitor* predicted 90 percent. Because of Ho’s popularity, the Americans had no intention of allowing the Geneva-promised referendum to take place.⁵²

An American-led defensive alliance in Asia had been discussed since the late 1940s. As the chances for saving the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu waned, the Eisenhower administration began to work in earnest on the concept, naming it “United Action.” Eisenhower had Dulles propose such an alliance for Southeast Asia on March 29, 1954, before the Overseas Press Club. Ike was forced to delay the creation of the alliance as the British were unwilling to begin discussions until after a settlement for Indochina had been decided upon at the Geneva Conference. Ike’s initiative eventually led to the creation of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization

(SEATO). Dulles spent much of April visiting with American allies pushing for the concept. The Manila Pact, creating SEATO, was signed in September 1954 and included the United States, Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Thailand, and Pakistan. Dulles tried to include Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam, but that would have violated the Geneva agreements, which preceded the Manila Pact. Senator Mike Mansfield was with the Manila delegation and signed the pact, rare for a member of Congress; Wayne Morse (Ind.-OR)⁵³ strongly favored the pact; in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he asked for the “pleasure” of moving that they ratify it and send it to the full Senate, where it passed 82–1. Morse and Mansfield came to regret their support for SEATO. Historian David L. Anderson argues that with SEATO, Eisenhower “created the legal rationale for America’s next war.” George Donelson Moss considers SEATO the first prong of US strategy developed in the summer of 1954; the second prong was to back Ngo Dinh Diem to head a permanent anti-Communist government in the Geneva-created zone south of the seventeenth parallel.⁵⁴

Eisenhower and the Decision to Support Ngo Dinh Diem

Ngo Dinh Diem was a Vietnamese nationalist and also a Catholic, a minority in South Vietnam, where Catholics never exceeded 10 percent of the population; more than 80 percent were Buddhist. Diem had served the French and Bao Dai in several administrative posts in the 1920s and 1930s. His strongest nationalist credential was that he never collaborated with the French; that credential was weakened somewhat by his willingness to work with Japanese occupation forces during World War II. Bao Dai asked Diem to serve as prime minister in 1949, but Diem refused because the position lacked power under French rule. Instead, Diem went into exile. That exile aided Diem because nationalists who stayed and refused to join Ho’s Viet Minh were forced to work with the French. Diem was not tainted by that colonial connection. Diem’s exile was a hindrance when competing with Ho and the Viet Minh, who had fought both the French and the Japanese; Diem had not.

Diem met Wesley Fishel in Japan in 1950. Fishel, a political scientist who later taught at Michigan State University, encouraged Diem to come to the United States, where he introduced him to Francis Cardinal Spellman. Spellman introduced Diem to other important American figures, including Supreme Court justice William O. Douglas, although Douglas may have met Diem on a previous visit to Asia. In 1953, Justice Douglas introduced Senators Kennedy and Mansfield to Diem. Diem became the best-known Vietnamese nationalist in this country, with many influential supporters in what was called the Vietnam lobby. He spent several years at Maryknoll seminaries in New Jersey and New York while lobbying on the need for an independent Vietnam; Robert Scheer believed that this period as a lobbyist “was perhaps the most successful role in his political life.” Fishel then hired Diem at Michigan State in 1953 as a Southeast Asian consultant.⁵⁵ Ellen Hammer wrote: “Diem’s fervent Catholicism opened many doors”; Thomas Boettcher claimed, “Diem’s Catholic faith was his most positive political attribute in this country, for it was the only thing about him that did not seem irredeemably foreign to America’s parochial leaders.”⁵⁶ Senator Wayne Morse harshly interpreted the beginnings of US involvement with Diem’s American exile:

He sat out the war in Washington, D.C., and in New York City. We made him our boy and took him back to Saigon, set him up in government, financed him and militarized him, and then committed ourselves to him. That is where the commitment came from, from our own diplomatic illegitimate offspring.⁵⁷

In late June 1954, Diem arrived in Vietnam as prime minister under Emperor Bao Dai. The likely scenario, suggested by Dulles and others, is that the French selected Diem because he was the most likely candidate to attract Vietnamese nationalists and receive US support. Diem's hatred for the French made them come to regret their decision. Diem's earlier lobbying paid dividends, as the Eisenhower administration had been checking him out before the French pulled the trigger on his appointment. At a February 16, 1954, executive session of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee with Under Secretary of State Bedell Smith, Senator J. William Fulbright (D-AR) talked of the need for a strong leader, saying, "If [Bao Dai] is not any good, we ought to get another one." Smith answered that a change in leadership was under consideration, referring to "providing certain religious leadership," which was likely code for Diem. After a May meeting with Diem, C. Douglas Dillon, the US ambassador to France, cabled Dulles a mixed message:

He impresses one as a mystic who has just emerged from a religious retreat into the cold world which is, in fact, almost what he has done. He appears too unworldly and unsophisticated to be able to cope with the grave problems and unscrupulous people he will find in Saigon. Yet his apparent sincerity, patriotic fervor and honesty are refreshing by comparison and we are led to think that these qualities may outweigh his other deficiencies.

On balance we were favorably impressed but only in the realization that we are prepared to accept the seemingly ridiculous prospect that this Yogi-like mystic could assume the charge he is apparently about to undertake only because the standard set by his predecessors is so low.⁵⁸

Senator Mansfield's top aide claimed that Diem was "a name [Mansfield] carried" after Justice Douglas introduced them in 1953. At the same time Dillon was writing to Dulles, Mansfield received a letter from William vanden Heuvel, who worked at the US Embassy in Thailand, with a view similar to Dillon's and one that showed how desperate the US government was to preserve a non-Communist southern state in Vietnam:

Now that we have a Vietnamese leader without taint, I should hope that our Government will lend every means to build him into the strong figure he must become. I have heard criticisms of Diem which describe him as "too religious" and "too much the fanatic." My reply is that at this late hour perhaps only a fanatic zeal can galvanize the forces necessary for victory.⁵⁹

While most Vietnamese Catholics lived in the North, Diem was attractive to the well-educated and politically motivated Catholic minority in the South. Under the terms of the Geneva agreements, and with the help of a CIA propaganda program, more than one-half of the northern Catholics soon migrated south, broadening Diem's appeal. But this Catholic migration also caused tension with non-Catholic southerners. After appointing Diem prime minister, Bao Dai remained in France, where he always felt more comfortable; he never returned to Vietnam.

The Eisenhower administration still had doubts about Diem's abilities. In August, Ike planned a letter of support to Diem; it was drafted in September, but was not sent until late October. It was released after a well-publicized Senate report based on a Mansfield visit to Vietnam that claimed no "promising" alternatives to Diem and concluded: "In the event that the Diem government falls, therefore, I believe that the United States should consider an immediate suspension of all aid to Vietnam and the French Union forces there, except that of a humanitarian nature." Chester Cooper described the link between Mansfield's report and the release of Eisenhower's letter to Diem:

Mansfield's report had an important influence on the Administration's decision to move forward with an aid program for the struggling Saigon Government. . . . President Eisenhower sent a letter to Premier Diem, and it was that letter that was cited by the members of the Kennedy Administration and even more often by officials in the Johnson Administration to relate the origin and continuity of U.S. policy in support of Diem to the earliest years of the Eisenhower Administration.⁶⁰

Perhaps as a response to Mansfield's criticism of US aid, Ike's letter to Diem offering assistance did have some general performance criteria; the president did not issue a *carte blanche*:

The purpose of this offer is to assist the Government of Viet-Nam in developing and maintaining a strong, viable state, capable of resisting attempted subversion or aggression through military means. The Government of the United States expects that this aid will be met by performance on the part of the Government of Viet-Nam in undertaking needed reforms. It hopes that such aid, combined with your own continuing efforts, will contribute effectively toward an independent Viet-Nam endowed with a strong government. Such a government would, I hope, be so responsive to the nationalist aspirations of its people, so enlightened in purpose and effective in performance, that it will be respected both at home and abroad and discourage any who might wish to impose a foreign ideology on your free people.⁶¹

By spring 1955, General J. Lawton Collins, President Eisenhower's temporary ambassador to South Vietnam, had lost confidence in Diem, and the so-called Vietnamese sects joined in open rebellion against his government. With the help of his American supporters, particularly Colonel Edward Lansdale of the CIA, Diem dealt effectively with this challenge and regained the support of the Eisenhower administration.

The administration wanted to avoid the reunification elections promised at the Geneva Conference, but did not openly say so, fearful of forcing the North to resume the war. Instead, they recommended conditions for a plebiscite that Communists had already rejected in Germany and Korea. That summer, Diem rejected America's cautious approach, repudiated the Geneva-promised elections, and instead scheduled an October plebiscite between himself and Bao Dai. In a fraud-filled election, Diem claimed 98.2 percent of the vote.⁶²

Diem's success in the first half of 1955 was aided by Joseph Kennedy, the senator's father, and Francis Cardinal Spellman, both of whom became leaders in the Vietnam lobby. Later in that year, that group created American Friends of Vietnam (AFV), a formal lobbying organization for Diem and South Vietnam. By 1956, the AFV counted thirty-two members from the House and five senators in the organization, including Kennedy. Among other influential Americans belonging to the AFV were Justice Douglas and Henry Luce, publisher of *Time* and *Life*. The group lost influence by the early 1960s as many members left due to disenchantment with Diem. After Diem was deposed, it reemerged as a proponent of American escalation in Vietnam.⁶³

The AFV's initial goal was to persuade the American public and the Eisenhower administration to thwart the unification elections promised at the Geneva Conference. John Kennedy delivered a speech to the AFV on June 1, 1956, and in his address, he made the expected argument against holding elections, but the administration didn't need persuading; it was already in agreement with the AFV on the issue. President Eisenhower himself sent his "warm greetings" to the conference participants.⁶⁴

Like most Americans at the time, Kennedy flagrantly exaggerated Diem's successes in this speech. The senator's rhetoric would have made it difficult for him to disengage from Vietnam after he was elevated to the presidency. Kennedy argued that "Vietnam represents the cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia, the keystone to the arch, the finger in the dike," followed by a stark interpretation of the domino theory and the paternalistic line: "If we are not the parents of little Vietnam, then surely we are the godparents." The senator must have later realized his hyperbole, as he left all of these things out of a summary of this speech published in a book on his foreign policy positions timed for his run for the presidency. Kennedy continued in his Washington speech to the AFV:

Informational and propaganda activities, warning of the evils of Communism and the blessings of the American way of life, are not enough in a country where concepts of free enterprise and capitalism are meaningless, where poverty and hunger are not enemies across the 17th parallel but enemies within their midst. As Ambassador Chüöng⁶⁵ has recently said: "People cannot be expected to fight for the Free World unless they have their own freedom to defend, their freedom from foreign domination as well as freedom from misery, oppression, corruption."⁶⁶

North Vietnam actively attempted to consult with Diem's government to prepare for reunification elections, but these efforts were ignored by the South and received little support from the Geneva signatories, including China and the Soviet Union. Kahin maintained that some US officials viewed the elections called for in the Geneva agreements as a "binding commitment"; there were Americans who agreed with France and Britain that the war would immediately resume if the elections were not held. That did not happen, but failure to hold elections made a second Indochina war inevitable. After defeating the French, Ho's government was not willing to settle for less than half of Vietnam. America had fashioned an inconsistent position of supporting reunification elections in Germany and Korea, where the United States expected to win, but not in Vietnam, where it was sure to lose. The United States "contradicted" its pledge at Geneva: "In the case of nations now divided against their will, we shall continue to seek to achieve unity through free elections supervised by the United Nations to insure that they are conducted fairly." When the elections were not held and there was no immediate and dramatic response from Hanoi, a certain complacency set in with the belief that nation building in South Vietnam would be successful.⁶⁷

American Friends of Vietnam also worked for several years to bring Diem back to the United States for a triumphant return, and that visit occurred in May 1957. Eisenhower personally greeted Diem at the airport and called him the "miracle man" of Asia, even loaning Diem his personal airplane for his stay. Diem spoke to the National Press Club, was honored by the AFV, received an honorary degree from Michigan State University, had a reception with the Council on Foreign Relations, had breakfast and a private mass with Cardinal Spellman, had a private luncheon with John D. Rockefeller, attended a banquet in his honor hosted by Time-Life's Henry Luce, delivered a speech to a joint session of Congress, and was feted with a parade in New York City. This marked the pinnacle of Diem's popularity in the United States; Luce's *Life* magazine defended Diem's decision not to hold unification elections by saying: "Diem saved his people from this agonizing prospect simply by refusing to permit the plebiscite and thereby he avoided national suicide."⁶⁸

James Arnold writes of Eisenhower that "once having established American policy toward Vietnam, after mid-1955 he played a diminished role." Diem's successes in 1955 and Eisenhower's heart attack later that year led the president to concentrate on other issues. The course was set by that time: the United States had taken over the training of South Vietnam's military, SEATO was on its way to fruition, and the

administration had decided to fight reunification elections. The belief continued to be that Diem had created a “miracle” in spring 1955 and that the country was coming along reasonably well.⁶⁹

That belief was not seriously shaken by the Caravelle Manifesto in April 1960, or a coup attempt later in the year. The manifesto was named for the hotel where a group of prominent anti-Communist South Vietnamese met; eleven were former cabinet members, and several had been considered by the Eisenhower administration to head a new government in spring 1955. The manifesto indicted “anti-democratic elections,” “continuous arrests,” and the power given to Diem’s “family.” Gibbons called it “a frank and compelling statement of the problems facing Vietnam, and an urgent appeal to Diem to take corrective action.” No newspaper in South Vietnam would print the manifesto for fear of Diem’s retribution, and the story was ignored by the US press. Diem reacted by waiting for six months before arresting many of the signers.⁷⁰

The coup attempt occurred in November 1960 and came close to succeeding. The leaders did not want to depose Diem; they merely sought political reform. Mansfield cabled Diem, their final extant correspondence: “deeply concerned by difficulties in Viet Nam but relieved to learn that you are safe and well and in a position to deal with wisdom and compassion with the difficulties in a way which will preserve Viet Nam’s integrity and contribute to your country’s continuing growth and freedom.” Professor Fishel wrote Mansfield on the same day, talking of the excessive power of Diem’s immediate family that led to hostility and contributed to the coup. Fishel added:

This revolt should serve as a signal to Ngo that there is a serious unrest in the country; one hopes that he will react by making reforms, in his administration, rather than accepting advice which he is certain to be offered by certain of his aides, to the effect that the solution to the problem is increased repression.⁷¹

Fishel’s hopes were not realized, as Diem reacted to the coup attempt and other changing circumstances with increased repression, leaving non-Communist nationalists with few choices. In discussing the Ngo oligarchy, the *Pentagon Papers* claim that “Diem alienated one after another of the key groups within South Vietnam’s society until, by late 1960, his regime rested on the narrow and disintegrating base of its own bureaucracy and the northern refugees,” most of whom were Catholic.

Starting in spring 1959, Communist guerilla attacks had resumed in earnest in South Vietnam.⁷² Eisenhower, in perhaps his most lengthy formal public discussion and defense of US policy to that point, delivered an address at Gettysburg College on April 4, 1959, titled “The Importance of Understanding.” Ike was adamant:

Unassisted, Viet-Nam cannot at this time produce and support the military formations essential to it, or, equally important, the morale—the hope, the confidence, the pride—necessary to meet the dual threat of aggression from without and subversion within its borders.

Strategically, South Viet-Nam’s capture by the Communists would bring their power several hundred miles into a hitherto free region. The remaining countries in Southeast Asia would be menaced by a great flanking movement. The freedom of twelve million people would be lost immediately, and that of 150 million others in adjacent lands would be seriously endangered. The loss of South Viet-Nam would set in motion a crumbling process that could, as it progressed, have grave consequences for us and for freedom.

We reach the inescapable conclusion that our own national interests demand some help from us in sustaining in Viet-Nam the morale, the economic progress, and the military strength necessary to its continued existence in freedom.⁷³

That summer, six American advisers in Bien Hoa were watching a movie after dinner when Viet Minh guerillas opened fire through a window, killing Major Dale R. Buis, Master Sergeant Chester M. Ovnand, two South Vietnamese guards, and a Vietnamese child. Buis and Ovnand are the first two names inscribed on the Vietnam War Memorial. In December 1960, the Communists formed a political arm, the National Liberation Front (NLF), inviting non-Communists to join, and many did. By the end of the Eisenhower administration, what the Diem government and Americans pejoratively called the Vietcong (meaning Vietnamese Communists) controlled large areas of the countryside, and 85 percent of Vietnam was rural. Vietnam was a growing concern. Yet John F. Kennedy assumed office believing that the real problem in Indochina was in Laos, not in South Vietnam.⁷⁴

John F. Kennedy and Competing Tensions, 1961–1963

When John Kennedy became president in 1961, there were “about 800 advisors in Vietnam, a number that had not changed significantly since 1955.”⁷⁵ By the time he was assassinated in November 1963, there were over sixteen thousand.⁷⁶ Kennedy increased “U.S. commitment in an effort to prevent South Vietnam from being overrun by Communists, as well as to demonstrate to the Soviets, in particular, that the United States was going to “stand firm throughout the world” against “Communist-led ‘wars of national liberation.’”⁷⁷ Compared to other hot spots like Berlin, the Bay of Pigs, and the nuclear confrontation over Cuba, Vietnam was not a main foreign policy concern for the Kennedy administration, yet his role in Southeast Asia was “unsurprisingly the most controversial aspect of his public image and record.”⁷⁸

Kennedy “never delivered a major address about Vietnam” during his presidency.⁷⁹ But Congressman and Senator Kennedy did speak about the region. This early rhetoric and his subsequent presidential decision-making were marked by the competing tensions of viewing this struggle as one of stopping Communist expansion in Southeast Asia while simultaneously recognizing the problems and complexities of the region.

Even before his remarks to the AFV referred to previously, a 1951 “fact-finding mission to the Middle and Far East” convinced Congressman John Kennedy that failure to defend freedom in Southeast Asia would lead to its domination by Communist China. Yet he “clearly disagreed with the methods the French employed,” and believed that their “anachronistic colonialist mentality” had blinded them “to the nationalistic aspirations of the native peoples of the region.”⁸⁰ In a radio address given after his return, Kennedy presciently warned that the “complexities of Southeast Asia . . . called for particular policies.” While it was necessary “to check the southern drive of Communism,” this could not be accomplished solely through military means. “The task is, rather, to build strong native non-Communist sentiment within these areas and rely on that as a spearhead of defense. To do this apart from and in defiance of, innately nationalistic aims spells foredoomed failure.”⁸¹ However, even while questioning the wisdom of their policies, Kennedy “supported funding the French war in Indochina, asserting that the United States must prevent ‘the onrushing tide of Communism from engulfing all Asia.’”⁸² The competing complexities during this period of his political career evinced tensions that “foreshadowed John Kennedy’s presidential rhetoric on Vietnam.”⁸³

Search for Direction, 1961

Kennedy came to the presidency “more interested in foreign affairs than domestic and the bulk of his presidential time, talent and energy was consumed with global concerns.”⁸⁴ Vietnam had been barely mentioned during the presidential campaign. After several briefings by CIA director Allen Dulles, the president-elect first met with Eisenhower on December 6, 1960, to discuss several foreign policy issues, but Vietnam was not among them.⁸⁵ Their second meeting was on January 19, 1961, the day before the inauguration. At this meeting it was stated that if a political settlement could not be reached in Laos, “the United States must intervene in concert with our allies. If we are unable to persuade our allies, then we must go it alone.” Clark Clifford, an adviser to the president-elect during the campaign, wrote that the warning came as a surprise and “had a powerful effect on Kennedy, [Secretary of State Dean] Rusk, [Secretary of Defense Robert] McNamara, and me.”⁸⁶

The Eisenhower administration had opposed Laotian prince Souvanna Phouma’s attempts to create a neutralist government in Laos, and supported right-wing, pro-Western general Phoumi Nosavan. The Soviets, in turn, supported the Pathet Lao (Communist) and Prince Souvanna’s neutralist forces. Kennedy inherited a civil war between the factions, and in February and March 1961 spent a great deal of time on this issue.

Much of the opening statement at the news conference of March 23, 1961, focused on what Kennedy called the “difficult and potentially dangerous problem” of Laos. Kennedy stated that he and General Eisenhower had “spent more time on this hard matter than on any other thing. And since then it has been steadily before the administration as the most immediate of the problems that we found upon taking office.” Having established its importance and the bipartisan nature of his concerns, Kennedy used a series of maps to illustrate that since “the last half of 1960,” the Pathet Lao had “turned to a new and intensified military effort to take over” with “increasing support and direction from outside.” He stated that “we strongly and unreservedly support the goal of a neutral and independent Laos,” and addressed specifically that “if in the past there has been any possible ground for misunderstanding of our desire of a truly neutral Laos, there should be none now.” This position “has been carefully considered and we have sought to make it just as clear as we know how to the governments concerned.” Kennedy argued that a peaceful solution would require a cessation of Pathet Lao aggression. He warned that if the attacks did not stop, “those who support a truly neutral Laos will have to consider their response. . . . No one should doubt our resolutions on this point.” Finally, Kennedy explained the stakes in Laos to an American audience that was becoming well-versed in the domino theory: “The security of all Southeast Asia will be endangered if Laos loses its neutral independence. Its own safety runs with the safety of us all.”⁸⁷

Kennedy returned to this last topic in response to a question concerning the “national unawareness of the importance of a free Laos to the security of the United States and to the individual American.” The president pointed out that Laos bordered both Thailand (“to which the United States has treaty obligations under the SEATO Agreement of 1954”) and South Vietnam (“to which the United States has very close ties”). Thus, given its strategic location, “If the Communists were able to move in and dominate this country, it would endanger the security of all, and the peace of all, of Southeast Asia.” As a “country which is concerned with the strength and cause of freedom around the world, that quite obviously affects the security of the United States.”⁸⁸ Ultimately, Kennedy did not intervene militarily in Laos, and in May the three factions began negotiations in Geneva. In July 1962, a fragile coalition government was established.⁸⁹

One reason JFK did not intervene in Laos was the Bay of Pigs fiasco that occurred in mid-April. Kennedy was persuaded to implement a plan developed in the

Eisenhower administration to allow Cuban refugees, trained and supplied by the CIA, to invade Cuba; according to Mann, the military “virtually guaranteed” success. Kennedy lost confidence in the Joint Chiefs of Staff after the Bay of Pigs. Attorney General Robert Kennedy and JFK adviser Ted Sorensen believed that without the failure in Cuba, the president might have intervened in Laos. Kennedy later said to Sorensen, “Thank God the Bay of Pigs happened when it did. Otherwise, we’d be in Laos by now—and that would be a hundred times worse.” The Cuban failure and the perceived loss in Laos over the neutrality compromise led adviser Walt Rostow to tell the president, “Vietnam is the place, where . . . we must prove that we are not a paper tiger.” This was reinforced by William Bundy’s observation that Kennedy’s “decision to compromise in Laos made it essential to convey by word and deed that the US would stand firm in South Vietnam and the rest of Southeast Asia.”⁹⁰

This attitude was reinforced by other events during 1961. Just before Kennedy’s inauguration, Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev “publicly advocated a policy in which wars of national liberation would commence in earnest,”⁹¹ the Soviet Union successfully put a man in space just before the disaster at the Bay of Pigs, and Kennedy was “sobered and shook” by Khrushchev’s attempt to “intimidate” him at the Vienna summit. After the meeting, Kennedy admitted to James Reston of the *New York Times*, “Now we have a problem in making our power credible, and Vietnam looks like the place.”⁹² Later in the year, the Berlin crisis occurred. Each of these events placed pressure on the new president for a success, and the likely place for such a victory looked like it would have to be in South Vietnam.

Shortly after assuming office Kennedy received General Edward Lansdale’s negative report following his visit to South Vietnam. Lansdale described “Vietnam as a combat area of the cold war . . . requiring emergency treatment.”⁹³ “Shocked” at the amount of Vietcong activity, he found South Vietnam to be in “critical condition” and his old friend Diem to be in serious trouble. Kennedy said to Rostow: “This is the worst one we’ve got, isn’t it? You know, Eisenhower never mentioned it. He talked at length about Laos, but never uttered the word Vietnam.” Following the meeting, Kennedy made his first presidential decision on Vietnam by approving a counterinsurgency plan for the area.⁹⁴ Some have suggested that Lansdale’s report launched “the Kennedy administration’s Vietnam policy.”⁹⁵ From that point forward, the new administration would increase the number of US personnel in South Vietnam and pour money into supporting Diem’s government, even though it meant openly circumventing the 1954 Geneva Accords.⁹⁶

In the spring and fall of 1961, as part of his effort to understand the problems presented by Vietnam, the president dispatched several fact-finding missions. In retrospect it seems as though each mission highlighted the increasing complexities of the situation while simultaneously providing a rationale for increased commitment by restating the negative consequences that would attend the presumed loss of Vietnam. Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric led the first mission on April 20; Lansdale and Walt Rostow were among its members. Their charge was to propose measures to “prevent Communist domination” of Vietnam. Their report recommended higher levels of US funding to increase the size of the South Vietnamese military and more US trainers to work with the South Vietnamese army, including army Green Berets. Gilpatric’s report faced some opposition from members of the administration, including Rusk, but Kennedy approved much of it. Presidential adviser William Bundy later said that the administration “was impregnated with the belief” that Communism “was on the offensive . . . and that it must now be met solidly.”⁹⁷

At a May 5, 1961, press conference the president announced that he had asked “Vice President Johnson to undertake a special fact-finding mission to Asia.” At that same news conference when asked about sending American troops to Vietnam, Kennedy replied that the United States was ready “to assist Viet-Nam to obtain its independence,” but this was “a matter still under consideration.” The vice president

would be consulting with “the Government of Viet-Nam as to what further steps could most usefully be taken.”⁹⁸

The purpose of the vice president’s mission to Saigon was to “affirm and promote the U.S. commitment[,] . . . extract more of a commitment from Vietnam,” and provide Kennedy with a sense of distance even though the White House “control[led] every important aspect of [the] trip.”⁹⁹ Johnson presented Diem with a presidential letter “that pledged U.S. readiness to join with you in an intensified endeavor to win the struggle against communism.”¹⁰⁰ In a speech before the national assembly of South Vietnam Johnson assured Diem that “the United States stands ready to assist in meeting the grave situation which confronts you” and later praised him as the “Churchill of Asia.”¹⁰¹ Some seized on this comment as a reason to ridicule Johnson’s trip, but he had “been directed to laud Diem and his accomplishments,” in order to “create in [him] a higher sense of his own importance in the eyes of the United States and the world.”¹⁰² As Stanley Karnow observed, by this point official policy was that, “whatever Diem’s shortcomings, the United States would ‘sink or swim’ with him.”¹⁰³

Diem and the vice president discussed the “key question being considered in Washington,”¹⁰⁴ the possibility of introducing more American troops into Vietnam. Diem “responded unenthusiastically” to this idea,¹⁰⁵ worried that more American troops “would compromise his nationalist reputation and give credence to the Communist slogan ‘My-Diem,’ or American Diem.” He did not “want U.S. troops to fight in his country except in the case of overt aggression against South Vietnam,” but he would welcome American troops for the purposes of training his army.¹⁰⁶ On May 13 a joint communiqué was issued stating that the United States recognized “its responsibility and duty, in its own self-interest as well as the interests of other free peoples, to assist a brave country in the defense of its liberties against unprovoked subversion and Communist terror,” and lauded Diem as “in the vanguard of those leaders who stand for freedom on the periphery of the Communist empire.”¹⁰⁷

Johnson’s report maintained that the “battle against Communism must be joined in Southeast Asia . . . or the United States, inevitably, must surrender the Pacific and take up our defenses on our own shores.” Further, there was “no alternative to United States leadership in Southeast Asia. Leadership in individual countries . . . rests on the knowledge, and faith in United States power, will and understanding.”¹⁰⁸ Vietnam and Thailand were the most immediate and important “trouble spots critical to the U.S. . . . The basic decision in Southeast Asia is here. We must decide whether to help these countries . . . or throw in the towel in the area and pull back our defenses to San Francisco and a ‘Fortress America’ concept. More important, we would say to the world in this case that we don’t live up to treaties and don’t stand by our friends.” Johnson observed that Diem “has admirable qualities, but he is remote from the people [and] is surrounded by persons less admirable and capable than he. The country can be saved—if we move quickly and wisely. We must decide whether to support Diem—or let Vietnam fall.” Johnson “finessed the ticklish problem of U.S. combat troops”¹⁰⁹ with his observation that “Asian leaders—at this time—do not want American troops involved in Southeast Asia other than on training missions. American combat troop involvement is not only not required, it is not desirable.”

In retrospect the vice president’s report highlights the tension that marks the rhetoric of this time. It recognized the problems with the Diem government, but still offered the simple bifurcated choice of making a stand in Southeast Asia or retreating into “fortress America.” A stand in Southeast Asia meant making that stand in Vietnam, and Vietnam necessitated “supporting Diem despite his flaws.” Thus did Johnson’s report reinforce “the enhanced commitment of the United States to the South Vietnamese” and affirm “the strategic logic of American commitment and the policy strategies being employed in South Vietnam.”¹¹⁰

Shortly after Johnson's visit there was an "upsurge in Viet Cong attacks," which "continued to build into a countrywide offensive during the summer and fall of 1961."¹¹¹ These attacks led Diem to say that he would welcome the "symbolic presence" of more American combat soldiers. Through the summer and fall many of Kennedy's advisers and the Joint Chiefs pressed for more combat troops to convince the Communists "that the United States would not accept defeat."¹¹² Kennedy did not support an increased military presence, and against this backdrop, he "sent Maxwell Taylor to Saigon on a crucial mission."¹¹³

At the time of the Taylor mission—which included Walt Rostow and Edward Lansdale—it was clear "that the battlefield situation in South Vietnam was fast approaching the critical point" and this "unfavorable news [had] found its way into the newspapers"¹¹⁴ Taylor's entourage toured South Vietnam for ten days and briefed President Kennedy on November 3. Like the Johnson report, Taylor's was "guided by an unquestioning acceptance of the domino theory." Taylor, Rostow, and the others did not see the war in Vietnam as an internal struggle between nationalism and colonialism, but concluded that "the Communists are pursuing a clear and systematic strategy in Southeast Asia."¹¹⁵ The final report—written by Taylor himself—"recommended that up to 8,000 [combat troops] be sent, that more be sent if necessary, and most important, that the job could not be done without them."¹¹⁶ Taylor argued that the "chances of a South Vietnamese victory would be 'substantially improved if Americans are prepared to work side by side with the Vietnamese on the key problems.'" In practical terms this meant "a drastic increase in the level of American involvement" and a "radical increase of U.S. trainers at every level, as well as additional special forces."¹¹⁷

Taylor's report "triggered a sharp debate in Washington," where few "cared much for the half-in, half-out nature of the proposal."¹¹⁸ Secretary of Defense McNamara spoke for those favoring a more pronounced American role when he observed that the recommendation to send a "relatively small number" of American troops would "not convince anyone of our resolve."¹¹⁹ Others "voiced strong opposition to direct military intervention." Among these were Averell Harriman, Douglas MacArthur II, Senate majority leader Mike Mansfield, and Richard Russell, "the ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee."¹²⁰ Among those most concerned about introducing more American troops into Vietnam was the president, who was "shocked by Taylor's recommendation to send 8,000 combat troops to Vietnam,"¹²¹ and viewed the prospect as dangerous. The president planted "misleading stories" in the media that "stated flatly that Kennedy was opposed to sending combat troops to Vietnam and strongly implied that Taylor had not recommended doing so."¹²² But despite Kennedy's "aversion to the Taylor troop recommendation, a Communist victory in Vietnam seemed equally unacceptable."¹²³

The issue of how far to "commit" dominated concern over Vietnam in 1961. Fact-finding missions were dispatched to try to find a way to resolve what was perceived as a choice between unpalatable options. Kennedy was reluctant to commit more troops, but fretted over the prospect of losing the country to the growing Communist insurgency. The introduction of US combat forces could save the Saigon government but would change the entire nature of the conflict. There was also pronounced concern that Diem's regime was ineffective and out of touch with much of the country. The issue was settled on November 22, 1961, with National Security Action Memorandum No. 111 (NSAM-111). It did not authorize the introduction of American combat forces, but it did grant "a significant increase in American advisors and equipment."¹²⁴ Although holding an important line, this decision made the United States

an active partner in the struggle against the Viet-Cong [and] was a major step in the country's steady progression toward total intervention. Although the

president stopped short of committing a specific number of combat personnel to the fight, NASM-111 actually made the commitment open-ended and almost guaranteed that the number of U.S. uniformed personnel in South Vietnam would rise steadily as the military situation deteriorated. In effect, Kennedy had unlocked the door to eventual full-scale involvement.¹²⁵

Kennedy had “deepened the American commitment consistently and considerably during 1961 without any adequate discussion of the problem.” In Vietnam this meant “business as usual” in Saigon, and an “unchecked growth of the insurgency in the countryside.”¹²⁶

At a news conference on November 29, 1961, the president stated that the goal of American actions in Vietnam was “to permit the Vietnamese people to control their destiny.” We were working with the Saigon government to “increase the sense of commitment by the people of Viet-nam to the struggle.”¹²⁷ On December 15, 1961, Kennedy released a public letter in response to Diem’s plea for additional support. JFK pledged: “We are prepared to help the Republic of Viet-Nam to protect its people and to preserve its independence. We shall promptly increase our assistance to your defense effort.”¹²⁸ One week later, on December 22, 1961, Army Specialist Fourth Class James T. Davis was killed in a firefight, the “first American to die in open combat with the Viet Cong.”¹²⁹

Optimism, January 1962–May 1963

The “dark picture of the war” that marked the latter part of 1961 was replaced by “the success story in early 1962.”¹³⁰ Much of that year was marked by “optimistic reports about the progress of the U. S. military effort” in Vietnam and continued political support of Diem.¹³¹ Indeed as US Ambassador to South Vietnam Frederick Nolting told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, “The best way to win, the best way to maintain the independence of South Vietnam is to give [Diem’s] government full backing.”¹³²

By February the newly created Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) was offering “rosy portrayals of the struggle against the Viet Cong.”¹³³ The war had taken a “turn for the better. The influx of American advisors and equipment boosted the moral of the South Vietnamese troops,”¹³⁴ and Diem was “gradually, but surely winning the confidence and loyalty of the South Vietnamese people. The Viet Cong were on the run, [and] Diem’s American-backed army appeared to be winning.”¹³⁵

Much of the optimism “about developments in Vietnam in 1962 was related to the strategic hamlet program,”¹³⁶ “the ‘heart of U.S.-South Vietnamese counterinsurgency strategy.’”¹³⁷ The aim of the plan was to “corral peasants into armed stockades, thereby depriving the Vietcong of their support,”¹³⁸ and it appealed on several levels. For Saigon it “extended the government’s influence down to the smallest unit of Vietnamese society,” allowing Diem to “politically contest the Viet Cong.” For Americans it “dovetailed with prevailing counterinsurgency theories” that focused on the necessity of “cutting the Viet Cong off from their local sources of strength, i.e. by denying them access to the villages and the people.”¹³⁹ In January 1963, the JCS reported “that two thirds of the rural population . . . were ‘safely tucked away’ in strategic hamlets.”¹⁴⁰ Kennedy mentioned the success of the program as one reason why the “tunnel” of Vietnam was “in some ways lighter” than it had been.¹⁴¹ Indeed the “dominant view in 1962 and 1963 was that the strategic hamlet was the best hope for . . . defeating the Viet Cong insurgency.”¹⁴²

However, reports about the success of the strategic hamlet program differed greatly from its reality. Diem and his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu viewed it as “essentially

a means to spread their influence rather than a device to infuse peasants with the will to resist the Vietcong." While administration members "hailed the program," their enthusiasm for it "mainly reflected a yearning at the upper echelons of the U.S. establishment for positive signs."¹⁴³ The forced relocation of rural peasants to "concentration-camp like villages undermined the already materially weak government authority and supported the ever-growing Viet Cong organization."¹⁴⁴

Indeed much of the "progress" during this period "was largely an illusion as MACV officials processed and fed only positive information to administration officials, who eagerly accepted it as accurate and objective."¹⁴⁵ There is evidence that Kennedy "had come to believe the perception delivered by the uninterrupted string of false reports emanating from Vietnam."¹⁴⁶ Indeed, he told dinner attendees that the world looked better in September 1962 than when he took office and "the picture was dreary [and] [t]he tide was running against us in Vietnam."¹⁴⁷

There were however, other narratives that suggested that the situation in Vietnam was less than optimal. Although the press offered wide coverage concerning the doctrine of counterinsurgency—"the organizing principle of U.S. policy in South Vietnam in 1962"¹⁴⁸—journalists also reported much that differed widely from the official accounts. While the administration sought to "portray U.S. involvement as strictly a noble effort to aid a valued ally, many American journalists reported the darker side of the conflict. Where military and embassy press attaches announced outstanding success, they reported failure; where Diem and his brother Nhu were shown building 'democracy' in the South Vietnamese countryside, they reported repression and widespread discontent."¹⁴⁹

This led to a concern for how truthful the administration was being about Vietnam. The president's statement at a January 15, 1962, press conference that American troops were not engaged in combat,¹⁵⁰ was countered less than a month later when James Reston stated on the editorial page of the *New York Times* that the "United States is now involved in an undeclared war in South Vietnam. This is well known to the Russians, the Chinese Communists, and everybody else concerned except the American people."¹⁵¹ *Newsweek* followed with suggestions that the American military was concealing "the extent of U.S. involvement in the combat areas,"¹⁵² and the Republican National Committee suggested that the administration had been "less than candid" concerning the level of "United States involvement in the fighting in South Vietnam."¹⁵³ When asked about this in a February news conference, the president stated that he had "discussed this matter . . . with the leadership of the Republicans and Democrats when we met in early January and informed them of what we were doing in Viet-Nam." Further, "[Secretary of State] Rusk has discussed it with the House and Senate Foreign Affairs Committee," and "[Secretary of Defense] McNamara has discussed it with the Armed Services Committee."¹⁵⁴

Others challenged what appeared to be the administration's policy of unquestioned support for Diem. The editors of the *New Republic* identified this problem when they wrote that America had "capitulated to Diem and has bound itself to the defense of a client regime without exacting on its part sacrifices necessary for success."¹⁵⁵ In so doing Washington "deprived itself slowly but surely of all freedom of maneuver." It handed Diem "a blank check . . . without asking for any hard and fast commitments in return."¹⁵⁶ As Mann observed, it was a "vicious cycle. In order to 'save' South Vietnam from collapse, the United States could not afford to wait for Diem to move toward reform. Yet precisely because the Americans did not wait for or demand those reforms, Diem believed he could casually ignore advice and criticism from [Ambassador] Nolting and other U.S. officials."¹⁵⁷ US Ambassador to India John Kenneth Galbraith also "considered the Diem government a disaster and feared the U.S. was replacing the French as the colonial military force in the area."¹⁵⁸ In an April 4 memorandum he suggested that the United States should "measurably

reduce our commitment to the particular present leadership of South Viet-Nam," while keeping "open the door for a political solution."¹⁵⁹

In the Congress "Vietnam was still a minor problem in 1962, and one better left to the president and his State Department." Oregon's Wayne Morse was the only senator to express his opposition on the floor of the Senate, indicating that "he believed America's military adventure was an outright mistake." But his "concerns fell on deaf ears."¹⁶⁰ Another senator expressing concern was Mike Mansfield—an authority on Asia and early supporter of Diem. Mansfield had "started sending cautionary memos to Kennedy about the Indochinese situation in January 1961,"¹⁶¹ but believing it was his duty as majority leader to support the president, had "remained mostly silent" in public while discussing his concerns privately with Kennedy.¹⁶² His public silence was broken in June 1962 when he told the audience at Michigan State University's graduation that "events appear to be moving in Southeast Asia towards a point of critical decision," direly predicting that "at worst, we must be prepared for a possible conflict of indefinite depth and duration, dependent largely on our forces for its prosecution."¹⁶³ He "challenged the Cold War orthodoxy" that the fate of Southeast Asia linked directly to American security.¹⁶⁴ While Kennedy agreed with much of Mansfield's critique, his "continued belief in the domino theory" led him to conclude that American withdrawal from Vietnam "might mean a collapse of the entire area," and "Mansfield's temperate dissent made little news in the United States."¹⁶⁵

At the end of 1962 Mansfield made—at the request of President Kennedy—a fact-finding visit to Vietnam, his first since 1955.¹⁶⁶ On December 26 he discussed his findings with the president. While "acknowledging the optimism and enthusiasm of South Vietnamese and Americans,"¹⁶⁷ Mansfield predicted that victory would only be possible with "improvement from the South Vietnamese."¹⁶⁸ Indeed the situation in Vietnam had "deteriorated significantly since 1954," rural areas "remained insecure, Diem had grown older and more tired, and Nhu . . . was stepping into the breach." Mansfield predicted that if the "anti-guerrilla offensive and the strategic hamlet program failed . . . the United States would face pressure to take over the war itself."¹⁶⁹

In his report to the president, Mansfield reiterated an important point he had made at Michigan State: Vietnam was only "'desirable' to our national interests." To continue to state publicly that it was "essential or vital" could lead to increasing the American role there.¹⁷⁰ Thus Mansfield was suggesting that Kennedy's domino-theory rhetoric—as much as anything else—was defining Vietnam as more important to American interests than it really was, and creating a situation that could lead to deeper American involvement. At a press conference in March 1963, Kennedy was asked about Mansfield's recommendation to conduct "a thorough security reassessment in the Far East and . . . a [possible] reduction in our aid to that part of the world." The president replied that that would not be possible without "pull[ing] out of Southeast Asia and turn[ing] it over to the Communists. . . . [U]nless you want to withdraw from the field and decide that it is in the national interest to permit that area to collapse, I would think that it would be impossible to substantially change it."¹⁷¹

During this time the president evidently felt he needed to encourage Americans to continue their role in the vital effort to stop the spread of Communism. While he recognized that the "heavy burden" was fatiguing, no one "should regret" it. "If we fail the whole cause of freedom fails." Indeed, "When the history of this age is written . . . however tired and burdensome it may now seem—that is the record for which we will be remembered."¹⁷² Americans were the "keystone in the whole arch of the whole fight for freedom." Vietnam was an important part of that effort, and Americans were there "fighting and in some cases dying for the maintenance of other countries' freedom as well as their own."¹⁷³

Kennedy told the 1962 class at West Point that they would face demands “more pressing, and in many ways more burdensome, as well as more challenging than ever before in our history,” as they helped those “countries which are heavily engaged in the maintenance of their freedom.”¹⁷⁴ He made the same point in December during an interview retrospective about his first two years in office: “The willingness of the United States to accept burdens all around the world, I think is a fantastic story. We have one million Americans serving outside of their own country. There is no other country in history that has carried this kind of a burden.”¹⁷⁵

In his 1963 State of the Union message JFK observed that the United States had “maintained the frontiers of freedom from Viet-Nam to Berlin” and that “the spearpoint of aggression has been blunted in Viet-Nam.”¹⁷⁶ The president’s budget message labeled “Vietnam’s continuing struggle against massive armed subversion supported from without” a reminder of the “need and importance” of American assistance in the effort “to promote the security of the free world.”¹⁷⁷ Thus Kennedy’s public rhetoric was grounded in the idea that American efforts in Vietnam were an essential and vital element of the defense of freedom and security in the world. As he stated in an April 1963 message to Congress, “Around the world cracks in the monolithic apparatus of our adversary are there for all to see. This, for the American people, is a time for vision, for patience, for work and for wisdom. For better or worse, we are the pacesetters. Freedom’s leader cannot flag or falter, or another runner will set the pace.” And the president issued a familiar warning: “Freedom—all freedom, including our own—is diminished when other countries fall under Communist domination.”¹⁷⁸ This basic truth undergirded JFK’s rhetoric during this time. It was poignantly illustrated when he told the story of writing to the sister of an American serviceman who was killed in Vietnam and “who wondered whether her brother’s sacrifice had been worthwhile. . . . I wrote to her . . . that in the service that he rendered for the defense of that far-off country, he was defending the United States and its freedom.”¹⁷⁹

A Change in Direction, May–November 1963

Orrin Schwab observed that the “period between the drafting of NSAM-111 in November 1961 and the South Vietnamese coup of November 1963 was marked by the illusion of progress in the new Kennedy policy. The expansion of military assistance in the context of “counterinsurgency” doctrine suggested that the war was being won; that America’s involvement in Vietnam would remain limited because there would be no need to go further. This assessment was widely held until the disturbing events of the summer and fall of 1963 showed otherwise—the policy had failed.”¹⁸⁰ On November 1, 1963, Diem and his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu were killed in a coup that “ripped away the façade of progress and legitimacy in the South Vietnamese state”¹⁸¹ and probably “accelerated the Americanization of the Vietnam War.”¹⁸²

Upon returning from Saigon in the summer of 1962 Joseph Mendenhall observed that security in Vietnam had deteriorated and that “Diem and Nhu would never change.” The United States should “get rid of Diem, Mr. and Mrs. Nhu and the rest of the Ngo family” by “encouraging a military coup.”¹⁸³ Mendenhall’s report was kept secret, but support for getting rid of Diem “had existed on different levels of the U.S. government since the last year of the Eisenhower administration,”¹⁸⁴ and by the summer of 1963 support for Diem in Washington had declined drastically.¹⁸⁵

The case for allowing Diem to be removed was made starkly clear by the “Buddhist crisis” of 1963. In Hue on May 8, 1963, a group demonstrated for the “right to fly Buddhist flags on Buddha’s birthday.”¹⁸⁶ When several thousand gathered to hear a speech by a Buddhist leader, they were ordered to disperse. When they did not, the

deputy province chief ordered his men to open fire and several people were killed. The Diem government denied any responsibility and said that those who died were killed in the panic that ensued after a terrorist attack by the Vietcong.

Although the incident was lightly reported in the United States, it mobilized the Buddhists and “quickly became the rallying point of opposition to Diem’s autocratic and repressive rule.”¹⁸⁷ Thus began the “Buddhist crisis” that would continue through the summer and into the fall. The situation was not helped by Diem’s sister-in-law Madam Nhu, who displayed her “unfailing instinct for the wrong word at the wrong time,”¹⁸⁸ and enraged “the Buddhist leaders by issuing a statement that denounced them as Communist dupes.”¹⁸⁹

Interestingly, the “full gravity of the situation” was not yet recognized by the Americans. William Bundy called May 1963 “the most optimistic time period” of the entire American intervention. The “sincere optimism of large numbers of government officials and military officers did not change through the summer and into the fall of 1963, even as the Diem regime’s political problems grew more and more critical. Military, Defense Department, CIA and some State representatives could not help but to express confidence in the progress of the war and the pacification effort.”¹⁹⁰ Indeed, after getting Diem to make some concessions after the incident in Hue, Ambassador Nolting left “Vietnam on May 23, 1963 for a sailing vacation in the Aegean.”¹⁹¹ His deputy, William Trueheart, took a much harder line with Diem.¹⁹²

In the beginning the Buddhists “consigned themselves to marches and peaceful gatherings,” but by June, it was “obvious that these protests were having no impact” and the media “had lost interest completely.” On June 11, 1963, while “300 Buddhist monks and nuns blocked all entrances to a main intersection in Saigon,” Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc “sat in the lotus position and allowed fellow monks to pour [a] combustible mixture over him. . . . [He] struck a match and was immediately engulfed in flames.”¹⁹³ The act was photographed by Malcolm Browne and was on the front page of papers around the world the next day. When interviewed about the incident by CBS, Madame Nhu said that all “the so-called ‘Buddhist leaders’ [had] done is to barbeque a bonze” (a Buddhist monk)¹⁹⁴

As presented in the American media, the struggle was religious in nature, “between a Roman Catholic and Buddhists.”¹⁹⁵ Diem’s Catholicism — the very thing that had made him relatable to American politicians in the 1950s—isolated him in a country where Buddhists were the vast majority. The American government issued “both public and private warnings to the South Vietnamese that the spectacle of religious oppression was intolerable. The United States made clear it was dissociating itself from the actions of the Republic of Vietnam vis-à-vis its Buddhist citizens.”¹⁹⁶

During that summer “Vietnam began to attract Kennedy’s daily attention for the first time in his presidency.”¹⁹⁷ Asked at a July 17, press conference if the Buddhist crisis impeded the war, the president replied that it did, and lamented that it was “unfortunate” that it had “arisen at the very time when the military struggle has been going better than it has been in many months.” He hoped that the Vietnamese could “reach an agreement on the civil disturbances and also on respect for the rights of others.” But, he said, “the decision is finally theirs.”¹⁹⁸

During the crisis Kennedy continued to emphasize the importance that Saigon’s decisions would have in the war effort. In an interview with Walter Cronkite on CBS, Kennedy stated that the war in Vietnam could not be won “unless a greater effort is made by the Government to win popular support. . . . 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.” The Saigon government had “gotten out of touch with the people” in the last two months, and he was trying to “make it very clear” that repression of the Buddhists was “very unwise” and not “the way to win.” There was still time “to regain the support of the people,” with “changes

in policy and . . . personnel," without which the chances of winning "would not be very good." When Cronkite observed that all indications suggested that Diem had "no intention of changing his pattern," the president restated that "our best judgment is that he can't be successful on this basis. We hope that he comes to see that, but in the final analysis it is the people and the government itself who have to win or lose this struggle." He nonetheless maintained that it "would be a great mistake" to withdraw from the area. The "defense of Asia was "a very important struggle even though it is far away."¹⁹⁹

Kennedy reinforced this idea a week later in an interview with David Huntley and Chet Brinkley of NBC. When Huntley asked about "our difficulties in South Viet-Nam," the president stated that although "the struggle against the Communists was going better," there had been "difficulties with the Buddhists" since June. He observed that he had "to deal with the government [that was] there" but was trying to persuade it "to take those steps which will win back support." Kennedy stated that it would not be "helpful at this time" to reduce aid to South Vietnam, and reconfirmed that he still believed that the "domino theory" was applicable in Southeast Asia.²⁰⁰

All during the summer discussion proceeded "about the desirability of finding a replacement for Diem."²⁰¹ Ambassador Nolting was against removing Diem and believed that "the most likely result of a coup attempt that succeeded in killing Diem was civil war."²⁰² While in Europe, Nolting had learned by commercial radio broadcast that he would be replaced as ambassador. On June 27, 1963, Kennedy named Henry Cabot Lodge to the post. Lodge "had earned Kennedy's respect for his strength and toughness."²⁰³ He spoke fluent French, had visited Vietnam in the 1930s as a reporter, and was a Republican, thus providing Kennedy a measure of "insurance against recrimination should Vietnam go down the drain."²⁰⁴

Nolting spent his remaining time as ambassador trying to persuade Diem to "take the steps necessary to resolve the Buddhist problem," but the country's "political fabric continued to disintegrate," as the protests "increased in frequency and intensity."²⁰⁵ Just before leaving Vietnam the outgoing ambassador received assurances that Diem would "be conciliatory toward the Buddhists" although he "considered them subversive,"²⁰⁶ and protested that the Americans "understood neither the Buddhist problem nor his family's selfless contributions to Vietnam."²⁰⁷ Nolting left Vietnam on August 15, but upon his departure he publicly extolled Diem's devotion to "democratic principles" and "social justice," and asserted that he had "never seen any evidence of religious persecution" while in Vietnam.²⁰⁸

Between "Nolting's departure and Lodge's arrival, the Diem regime took a desperate gamble to suppress the Buddhist problem once and for all. If successful the plan would present the new ambassador with a *fait accompli*."²⁰⁹ On August 21, martial law was declared and "police and special forces loyal to Nhu" "launched a series of nationwide attacks against Buddhist pagodas" in cities across the country, and "arrested more than 1,400 Buddhist monks and nuns, stripping the movement of most of its leadership."²¹⁰ The United States publicly repudiated this action, and two days later "Vietnamese generals planning a coup against Diem made their first contact with an American representative."²¹¹

Lodge—en route to Vietnam and meeting with Nolting in Hawaii — went immediately to Tan Son Nhut. He was told that Nhu was "responsible for the recent pagoda raids and that while many South Vietnamese still respected Diem, it was essential to get rid of Nhu."²¹² It was widely believed that Diem would never allow that, and in an August 29 cable to Secretary of State Dean Rusk the new ambassador stated that "the war could not be won under a Diem administration, and that the U.S. therefore should support the ouster of Diem."²¹³

The South Vietnamese generals who favored a coup "did not feel sufficiently strong and feared abandonment" as members of the administration argued over the proper course of action.²¹⁴ Robert Kennedy remembered it as a time when division

among the president's advisers was so deep that it "was the only time really, in three years, the government was broken in two in a very disturbing [way]." ²¹⁵ Some favored supporting a coup to get rid of Diem, others feared that such an action would result in a "power vacuum that would endanger the military effort against the VC. The Diem regime meanwhile continued arrests of Buddhists and students." ²¹⁶

Although Senators George McGovern (D-SD) and Wayne Morse voiced their doubts about the American course in Vietnam, most of "the leading foreign policy voices in Congress had fallen virtually silent during the months of September and October." But there was concern that events in Vietnam would affect public opinion, and the "thought of a public and a Congress growing restless over a faltering U.S. policy in Vietnam and the troubling divisions among his own advisors worried Kennedy." ²¹⁷

The president dispatched McNamara and Taylor on a fact-finding mission to Southeast Asia. Their report—which some would later maintain was "misguided [and] contained a patently false characterization of the situation in South Vietnam" — "became the new guiding light of Kennedy's Vietnam policy." ²¹⁸ On October 5 the government began implementing its "recommendations for selective suspensions of aid" as a way to convey "displeasure at [Diem's] political policies and activities and to create significant uncertainty in that government and in key Vietnamese groups as to future intentions of United States." ²¹⁹ By the "middle of October, coup plotting was again in full bloom." ²²⁰ Ambassador Lodge—who "had lobbied hard for the coup from the time he assumed the ambassadorship in August" ²²¹—was its "primary cheerleader." South Vietnamese generals moved against the Diem government on November 1. Diem and Nhu were murdered shortly after they surrendered. At the White House President Kennedy was informed of their deaths by telegram. According to those in attendance he went ashen and "leapt to his feet and rushed from the room with a look of shock and dismay on his face." ²²²

In a press conference two weeks after the coup, the president said that he hoped the "new situation" in South Vietnam would lead to "an increased effort in the war," and that our objective was to help the South Vietnamese "maintain themselves as a free and independent country and promote democratic forces within the country to operate." ²²³ Ambassador Lodge's last cable to President Kennedy noted that "the whole trend of the [postcoup] crowd is to have warm and cordial relations with the American people and government." ²²⁴ Indeed on November 3, 1963, a *New York Times* editorial headlined "Opportunity in Vietnam" observed that the coup—"carried through by Vietnamese generals who . . . put the fate of their country above the fortunes of the Ngo family"—presented "the opportunity—and it may be the last opportunity—to establish a forward-looking democratically oriented government with a broad base of popular support, a government that could in fact carry the anti-Communist war to an ultimately successful conclusion." If the new government could gain the "loyalty and support [of] the Vietnamese people" and identify "itself with [their] aspirations . . . it will have taken a long step toward repulsing further Communist inroads throughout Southeast Asia." ²²⁵

When this editorial ran, John Kennedy had less than three weeks left in office. During his brief term he had "dramatically altered the U.S. role" in Southeast Asia. ²²⁶ Hard questions about Vietnam's relationship to American security interests were eschewed in favor of rhetoric grounded in Cold War platitudes that defined that country as a critical part of the struggle between freedom and slavery. Hard truths about the Diem regime were avoided as the United States poured into Vietnam "a flow of men and material . . . that [swelled] in inverse proportion to the staying power of [his] regime" to which that rhetoric bound the United States. ²²⁷ This tension was put into dramatic relief when the coup illustrated that all "the efforts and all the money spent on creating a separate noncommunist Vietnamese nation-state had failed to create a stable viable regime." ²²⁸ Long after the tragedy in

Dallas, the United States would reap the bitter consequences of these profoundly disturbing signs of failure.

The Gulf of Tonkin Incident Leads to an LBJ Mandate, 1963–1964

George Herring argues: “Between November 1963 and July 1965, Lyndon Baines Johnson transformed a limited commitment to assist the South Vietnamese government into an open-ended commitment to preserve an independent, non-Communist South Vietnam.”²²⁹ Unlike President Kennedy, Johnson did not enter office with a desire to focus on foreign policy. One day into his presidency, LBJ talked to some aides for hours about his intentions for the presidency. His goals were domestic; Vietnam was barely mentioned. The issue that would consume his presidency surfaced the following day at a meeting with his national security advisers for a briefing by Henry Cabot Lodge. Ambassador Lodge reported that the South Vietnamese military position was deteriorating. One month later, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara issued a bleak report on Vietnam: “The situation is very disturbing. Current trends, unless reversed in the next 2–3 months, will lead to neutralization at best and more likely to a Communist-controlled state.” Even though LBJ desperately wanted to concentrate on his domestic agenda, he committed to continuing Kennedy’s policy. Bill Moyers, one of Johnson’s top assistants, wrote that Vietnam made Johnson feel like a catfish who had “just grabbed a big juicy worm with a right sharp hook in the middle of it.”²³⁰

Johnson had been unhappy as vice president, and there were rumors that Kennedy would drop him from the 1964 ticket. To establish his own legitimacy, to maintain the public support Kennedy had earned, and to keep together the team Kennedy had assembled since he held those men in high regard, LBJ worked to persuade Kennedy’s advisers to remain in his administration. These aides, including McNamara, Dean Rusk, McGeorge Bundy, George Ball, Walt Rostow, and Maxwell Taylor, were the same men who had been advising Kennedy to increase the American commitment to South Vietnam, and they had a vested interest in the success of that policy. Of these advisers, McNamara, who came to be known as the “architect” of Vietnam policy, likely exercised the most influence on LBJ. Johnson lacked knowledge and had little confidence on foreign policy matters; while he may have dragged his feet in acting on the advice he received, LBJ ultimately followed the recommendations of the men selected by Kennedy. With the exception of Ball, each of these advisers had endorsed Kennedy’s policy of escalation.²³¹ In sum, LBJ’s allegiances would continue JFK’s policies. In a private conversation with Senate majority leader Mansfield’s top aide months before his reelection bid, President Johnson may have let the real reason for Americanizing the war slip when he said, “we do not want another China in Viet Nam.”²³² Like his predecessor, Johnson subscribed to the domino theory and believed that the loss of Vietnam would likely threaten “the whole of Southeast Asia.” As a result, it was incumbent upon the United States to “do everything that we can” to “stay there and help them, and that is what we are going to do.”²³³

As Johnson focused on his November 1964 bid for reelection, his military strategy was a gradual one, to increase troop levels and escalate just enough to avoid losing. His problems in Vietnam were political as well as military. The purge of Diem, which Vice President Johnson had opposed, did not produce the promised results; indeed, it might have made things worse. General Duong Van Minh and his French-trained junta replaced Diem and were a disappointment to LBJ’s team. Like Diem, Minh proved to be too independent; he sought possible negotiation with

the National Liberation Front and considered a neutralization proposal put forth by French president Charles de Gaulle. Neutralization was anathema to LBJ and his advisers; they had already rejected that suggestion from Mike Mansfield.

Mansfield started sending cautionary memos about Vietnam to the president before LBJ would have settled comfortably into his new living quarters in the White House. On December 7, 1963, the majority leader sent a memo based on a conversation the two men had, including copies of the memos Mansfield had sent to Kennedy, his Michigan State University speech, and his Senate report based on his trip to Indochina. After Johnson talked to Mansfield's aide Frank Valeo over Christmas, Mansfield sent another memo on January 6, 1964. Mansfield's argument was for neutralization. Johnson brought out his big guns to refute it: Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, and National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy. Thirty years later, McNamara admitted that he and Johnson's other principal advisers—Rusk and Bundy—were "limited and shallow" in their "analysis and discussions" about neutralization.²³⁴

The majority leader met with LBJ on February 10. A memo from Bundy suggested the president "urge Mansfield himself not to express his own doubts in public, at least for a while." If LBJ listened to Bundy's suggestion, Mansfield flouted the advice, delivering a Senate speech on February 19 that, among other things, called for considering French president Charles de Gaulle's neutralization proposal. Unofficially, Gibbons said the administration reaction ran from "shock to dismay to anger." One official said, "Of course it wasn't the Senator's intention to give aid and comfort to the communists and undermine Vietnamese and American morale, but that's exactly what he did. And he couldn't have done a better job if his speech had been written in Hanoi."²³⁵ Here was perhaps the last opportunity for Johnson to avoid a wider war and concentrate on his war on poverty, the so-called Great Society program, but LBJ feared that neutralization of South Vietnam would lead to the return of the "loss of China" charges and cost him the 1964 presidential election.

To avoid the threat of neutralization, the United States cooperated with General Nguyen Khanh in a bloodless coup to replace Minh. Afterward, Johnson sent Khanh a message via McNamara, "No more of this coup shit." But what Moss called "coup season" was on; there would be five more in the next year, and seven governments ruled South Vietnam in 1964 alone. Ball wrote in his memoir that "obscure" military leaders would come to power with the "life span of June bugs." Without a stable government to support, it proved difficult for the United States to wage a war against the Communist insurgents. With each successive government looking over its shoulder because of the threat of yet another coup, it was difficult for the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) to wage an effective war against the Vietcong.²³⁶

Militarily, the United States and its South Vietnamese ally were losing the war. Moss explained LBJ's policy in early 1964 as one "of doing the same that Kennedy had done, only doing more of it" in an effort to fend off the Communist rebellion. To avoid the humiliation of losing the war, Johnson reluctantly escalated by increasing the number of advisers in 1964 from 16,300 to 23,300 and raising the amount of aid to the South by \$50 million. Yet in the short term, to protect his domestic program and his job, Johnson rejected proposals by the JCS for attacking the North through the ground and air. He also appointed General William Westmoreland to command US forces in Vietnam and General Taylor to be US Ambassador in Saigon in an effort to strengthen the American team in country. By mid-summer 1964, the administration plan was to get a congressional resolution to give LBJ authority to wage war and to use graduated air strikes against North Vietnam, at least after Johnson was successfully reelected.²³⁷ Walt Rostow suggested such a congressional resolution in February 1964, and by late May, William Bundy had completed a draft. His brother, McGeorge, suggested to the president on June 12 that the resolution be presented in a way that would prevent "extended and divisive debate." After receiving that

memo, LBJ decided on June 15 to postpone the effort; with the election coming up, a congressional resolution seemed an unnecessary risk.²³⁸

Events in August brought the resolution off the table and stepped up the timeline for air strikes against targets in North Vietnam. While on a DE SOTO patrol, the USS *Maddox* was attacked by North Vietnamese torpedo boats on August 2. The *Maddox* was unscathed in the attack, not so the North Vietnamese vessels. The DE SOTO program involved US destroyers patrolling the Gulf of Tonkin near the coast of North Vietnam, both as a “show of strength” and to gather intelligence. The *Maddox* attack took place shortly after a 34-A raid by South Vietnamese gunboats against North Vietnamese military installations on two small islands near the *Maddox*, so to the North Vietnamese, the *Maddox* appeared to be part of the same operation. The *Maddox* had violated the twelve-mile coastal limit claimed by North Vietnam (the United States recognized only a three-mile limit); Gibbons calls it “clear” that South Vietnam and the United States were “provoking North Vietnam.” Two days later, the *C. Turner Joy* was sent to support the *Maddox*, and both reported attacks by North Vietnamese torpedo boats. It is likely that the second attack never happened, but was based on poor weather, bad sonar and radar readings, and jumpy sailors on the American ships, but the administration did not share its doubts with Congress or the public. After the reported second attack, Johnson ordered the bombing of North Vietnamese patrol boat bases and a supporting oil storage facility.²³⁹ President Johnson talked to the American people, emphasizing the moderation in his response: “Our response, for the present, will be limited and fitting. We Americans know, although others appear to forget, the risks of spreading conflict. We still seek no wider war.”²⁴⁰

Johnson’s retaliation worked domestically—a public opinion poll released August 10 showed 85 percent of Americans supported the air strikes; LBJ’s approval rating soared from 42 to 72 percent. The North Vietnamese attack in the Tonkin Gulf gave the administration a way to avoid the “extended and divisive debate” McGeorge Bundy had warned against in June. On August 4, Johnson met with sixteen congressional leaders to get what came to be known as the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution passed quickly; only Mansfield and George Aiken (R-VT) expressed any misgivings in the private meeting, but both supported the resolution in public. With a minimum of debate, the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution hastily passed in the House 416–0 and the Senate 88–2; Wayne Morse (D-OR) and Ernest Gruening (D-AK) voted against it.²⁴¹

In an impassioned and well-reasoned Senate speech on August 5, the Oregonian repeated the arguments against the war he had been making for some months, beginning: “I rise to speak in opposition to the joint resolution. I do so with a very sad heart. But I consider the resolution, as I considered . . . the Formosa resolution, and the . . . Middle East resolution to be naught but a resolution which embodies a predated declaration of war.” “For 10 years” the United States had “been a provocateur, every bit as much as North Vietnam” had been. “For 10 years” the United States had “violated the Geneva Agreement of 1954,” and “for 10 years” America had “sought to impose a military solution upon a political and economic problem.” In the Gulf of Tonkin, “the clear implication” was that the *Maddox* was “standing guard” while South Vietnamese gunboats attacked North Vietnamese installations. Morse talked of the “pious phrases of the resolution about defending freedom in South Vietnam,” declaring, “There is no freedom in South Vietnam.” Senator Morse decried the willingness of Congress to abdicate its constitutional responsibility to declare war. At the beginning of his speech, Morse had announced that he would not entertain questions during his speech, but would welcome them at the close. None were asked. The Senate was not willing to debate the vital issues raised by Morse.²⁴²

Ball concluded that “Congress had abdicated” in passing the resolution. Fulbright, as chair of the Foreign Relations Committee, efficiently shepherded the bill through the Senate, but soon regretted that decision. At the time, Fulbright trusted his old friend Johnson not to extend the war unnecessarily and feared a Barry Goldwater

win in the presidential election. Johnson aide George Reedy suggested a number of senators were

misled by Fulbright's assurances and Fulbright had every reason to believe those assurances. I was in the room that night they had that meeting in which Fulbright got the big briefing. There is no doubt in my mind at all, I don't know if Johnson actually used the words but there is no question that he was saying that this was a one-shot thing and it was only intended for this particular operation.²⁴³

George McGovern was one of the senators receiving Fulbright's assurances, and he considered his vote for the resolution the most regrettable of his career, writing in his memoir: "I commiserated with Bill Fulbright; he was just telling [Gaylord] Nelson (D-WI) and me what Johnson had told him." The Johnson administration came to interpret the resolution as Morse predicted, as "the functional equivalent of a declaration of war."²⁴⁴

Even after a raid at an air base at Bien Hoa right before the election killed five Americans and damaged and destroyed a number of US aircraft, Johnson rejected military advice to retaliate with air strikes; he had no reason to escalate and risk his expected electoral victory. Goldwater had been the hawk during the campaign, favoring escalation in Vietnam; Johnson's adept political handling of the Tonkin Gulf crisis took away Goldwater's major campaign issue and sealed the Arizonan's defeat. Johnson's more cautious rhetoric, like his most frequently quoted statement in Ohio—"We are not about to send American boys 9 or 10,000 miles away from home to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves"—helped him to win election, but came back to haunt him when he didn't live up to the promise.²⁴⁵ LBJ won in a historic landslide, giving him a mandate to pursue his domestic program and the war in Vietnam. Misleading Congress and the public over the incident in the Gulf of Tonkin, though, contributed to LBJ's infamous "credibility gap." After the American retaliatory bombing, North Vietnam escalated by sending, for the first time, units of its regular army to join the war in the South.²⁴⁶

By late 1964 or early 1965, LBJ committed to a gradual escalation, first through a sustained bombing campaign in the North and then by sending US ground troops to the South. Before the election, Johnson had already authorized the planning, and by the end of November, his top advisers had agreed on the need to bomb. In early October, James Reston reported in the *New York Times* that Johnson's advisers were talking about "how easy it would be to 'provoke an incident' in the Gulf of Tonkin that would justify an attack on North Vietnam." As usual, Ball strenuously disagreed with these decisions. In a sixty-seven-page memorandum he warned that "once on the tiger's back, we cannot be sure of picking the place to dismount." But Ball could not engage Johnson's team in "point-by-point" argument and believed he was treated with "benign tolerance" and as "almost subversive" by Johnson's advisers as they went about planning to win a war Ball didn't think could be won. On Christmas Eve, the Vietcong bombed officers' quarters in the Brinks Hotel in Saigon, killing two Americans. Johnson once again resisted advice for a retaliatory bombing, partially because of the instability of the government in Saigon. But as 1964 came to an end, Gibbons writes, the war "was on the verge of being 'Americanized.'"²⁴⁷

LBJ Escalates and the Antiwar Movement Rallies, January–June 1965

The Vietcong provided the excuse the administration had been waiting for on February 7, 1965, with an attack at Pleiku killing eight American troops, followed by an

assault on Qui Nhon three days later. Retaliatory raids on North Vietnam began on February 7 and became sustained on February 13 after a series of meetings LBJ held with administration officials and members of Congress. The bombing campaign officially became known as Operation Rolling Thunder on March 2. After Vietcong forces battered two ARVN units and with North Vietnamese regular forces entering the South, Taylor and McGeorge Bundy had sent warnings of “disastrous defeat” without US bombing; Johnson reluctantly agreed, saying, “Stable government or no stable government we’ll do what we have to do.”²⁴⁸

Everyone was in agreement on the need for retaliatory bombing at a meeting on February 6, including Ball, with the exception of Senator Mansfield, who looked directly at Johnson and said that the “attack has opened many eyes. We are not now in a penny ante game. It appears that the local population in South Vietnam is not behind us, [or] else the Viet Cong could not have carried out their surprise attack.” William Bundy remembered: “This was the only time I ever saw a member of Congress who said, ‘Mr. President, I think you are wrong on basic policy’ in any direct session.” Johnson recalled responding to his majority leader: “We have kept our gun over the mantel and our shells in the cupboard for a long time now. And what was the result? They are killing our men while they sleep in the night. I can’t ask our American soldiers out there to continue to fight with one hand tied behind their backs.” Perhaps intimidated by Johnson’s response, at the other meetings Mansfield attended, the majority leader expressed his dissent via memos. When Vice President Hubert Humphrey expressed reservations with the bombing at a February 10 meeting, LBJ banned him from Vietnam decision-making for a number of months.²⁴⁹

Johnson’s escalation was disturbing to Senator Frank Church (D-ID), who took to the Senate floor on February 17 to talk about it. Robert Mann considers this “bold” speech from one of the Senate’s finest orators important enough to lead with it in the prologue to his book on the role of Congress during the Vietnam War. Mann claims the speech marked the “cautious beginnings” of the “nine year congressional debate” over Indochina.

Of course, Morse and Gruening had spoken out earlier than Senator Church; they cast the only two congressional votes opposing the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. But Morse and Gruening were deviants and easy to discount; Church was not. Church biographers LeRoy Ashby and Rod Gramer suggest that Morse lacked influence with his colleagues because of his “gadfly’s reputation,” and “Gruening’s tendency to blame the U.S. as the aggressor struck most listeners as harsh and strident.” Frank Valeo, Mansfield’s aide and secretary to the Senate, called Morse “an extraordinary man” who “couldn’t get along with anyone for any length of time.” Mann labeled Morse and Gruening “mavericks, well known for their willingness to champion unpopular causes,” but Mann also indicated that “the two men had caused barely a ripple on Washington’s political waters.”²⁵⁰ Indeed, Morse’s “fiery” spring 1964 speeches on Vietnam filled more than two hundred pages in the *Congressional Record*, and he barnstormed the country repeating his “hellfire-and-brimstone” warnings to the nation. Senator McGovern believed that “personalizing” their attacks made Gruening and Morse less effective in their dissent. Church’s aide Bryce Nelson, in speaking of an earlier Church speech, felt that “younger and more cautious senators” didn’t want to be linked to Morse and Gruening because of their stridency, but they were willing to consider Church’s arguments.²⁵¹

Church had been troubled for some time by the drift toward war in Vietnam and had made remarks on the Senate floor on June 23, 1964, that Mann considered “significant” and Bryce Nelson labeled “important.” His biographers claim that these remarks were extemporaneous—that Church had planned to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, but became engaged in a debate with Fulbright over the desirability of utilizing the UN for a settlement in Vietnam. Church’s dissent in 1964 was relatively minor and did not break with

President Johnson in any significant way. But one publication interpreted his comments as marking “the day Frank Church became a dove.”²⁵²

By early 1965, Church was ready to risk breaking with his president, but he told a friend: “I’m reluctant to repudiate the President on Vietnam,” fearing that his action would remove “any chance that may be left to me to exert some moderating influence upon the future course of events.” After journalist Walter Lippmann called a Church-authored *New York Times Magazine* article “splendid,” and against the wishes of the senator’s wife, Church committed to using that article as the basis for a Senate speech three days later.

In his February 17 address to the Senate, Church pointed out that there was no stable government for the United States to support: “The weakness in South Viet Nam emanates from Saigon itself, where we, as foreigners, are powerless to unite the spoiling factions. A family feud is never settled by outsiders. Only the Vietnamese themselves can furnish the solution.” The senator pushed hard for negotiation, saying: “A spreading war on the Asian mainland, pitting American troops against Asian troops, is a war we cannot finish. In the end, after a tragic trail of casualties out of all proportion to our real national interest, we will have to negotiate a settlement with the Communists, even as such a truce was finally negotiated in Korea.” But the part of the speech that most angered the administration was his call for neutralization:

It would be to our national advantage then, to seek an international agreement for the neutralization of the whole great region that used to be French Indo-China. The transitional phase of such a settlement might be policed by the United Nations, or by a special high commission set up to preside over a cease-fire in South Viet Nam, to supervise the withdrawal of all foreign troops, and to maintain order, while an independent and unaligned new government is formed by the Vietnamese themselves.

As indicated previously, Church’s call for neutralization was not a new idea—French president Charles de Gaulle, Prince Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia, Lippmann, and Senator Mansfield all had pushed for it earlier—but it remained antithetical to Johnson and his advisers. McGovern, who had spoken out against American involvement in Vietnam in September 1963 but had been largely mute on the issue since, followed Church’s speech by endorsing his call for negotiations, giving the administration two new public Senate critics over its Vietnam policy. Both of these young Senate Turks proved formidable; Mann claims McGovern became “the war’s most visible and vociferous opponent.”²⁵³

Unlike Church’s 1964 speech, the February 17 address had an impact and caused a rift with the Johnson administration. The following day, Johnson sent his national security advisor, McGeorge Bundy, to meet with McGovern, Church, and several other emerging Senate critics in an effort to stifle public debate, but Church refused to be silenced. When the senators returned to the Senate floor, they were under attack from Republican and Democratic colleagues who supported an expanded war. That evening, Church and his wife were part of a group of several dozen senators and their spouses who met with President and Mrs. Johnson for a briefing on Vietnam. Johnson cornered Church in what the senator called a “nostril to nostril” conversation, trying “to show me my error.” Within days, Mann writes, “The civilized discourse that Church initiated would dissolve into a far wider and more belligerent debate over Vietnam policy.”²⁵⁴

Clark Clifford maintained that the Joint Chiefs of Staff and McNamara knew that once Rolling Thunder began, American troops would be required to protect aircraft on the ground and that later their role would inevitably become offensive. No one told the president this because they wanted him to agree to Rolling Thunder. General Westmoreland requested marines protect the air base at Da Nang in late

February, and even though General Taylor opposed it, arguing that once American troops were on the ground it would be “very difficult to hold the line,” the administration disregarded Taylor’s warnings, and thirty-five hundred marines waded ashore on March 8. This was one of the most crucial decisions in the American war, yet it was largely ignored in the United States. Westmoreland realized by mid-March that further US forces would be needed, and many administration officials agreed but feared domestic opposition like that expressed by Church. Rolling Thunder did not achieve its objective of forcing the North to negotiate on US terms; instead, North Vietnam escalated on the ground, further weakening the position of the South.²⁵⁵

Rolling Thunder had brought the war to television’s evening news and the front page of the daily newspapers, causing LBJ to fear that congressional conservatives would use the war as an excuse to block his Great Society program. Johnson’s advisers were taken by surprise when it also led to an actual antiwar movement with dissent spreading across the nation’s campuses. The first teach-in occurred at the University of Michigan on March 24, 1965, and the idea quickly caught on; on May 15, 122 campuses debated the war through teach-ins. In an attempt to combat domestic opposition, McGeorge Bundy wrote a speech for LBJ to justify the bombing based on the aggression emulating from North Vietnam. Johnson rejected it as a speech because it would seem like a formal announcement of a policy change, something the president was not willing to concede; instead, at the beginning of March, it was released as a white paper. Chester Cooper, a Bundy aide, was the major author of the final draft and believed that the argument the white paper made was “pretty frail” and a “dismal failure.” Part of the problem was much of the evidence that might have been used was classified, but the amount of Vietcong aid the white paper could document coming from North Vietnam and the Communist world was miniscule in comparison to the total the United States was pouring into the South.²⁵⁶

In addition to the domestic reaction, there was an international outcry over Rolling Thunder. Ball wrote in his memoir that what LBJ wanted from foreign leaders was “unquestioning support,” especially for the policy about which he was most “uncertain,” Vietnam. British foreign secretary Michael Stewart did not provide that support when he met with Rusk and Johnson before delivering a scathing speech at the National Press Club, concluding: “What I am in fact asking the United States to display is what your Declaration of Independence called ‘a decent respect for the opinions of mankind.’” Johnson did not enjoy hearing Jefferson’s words used against him by a Brit. United Nations secretary general U Thant had been trying to obtain private talks between the United States and North Vietnam but after being ignored by Washington and the initiation of Rolling Thunder, U Thant became a critic of the Johnson administration policy.²⁵⁷

On March 25, Johnson made an announcement that sounded like he was moving toward negotiation with North Vietnam; Cooper later called it “merely rhetoric, a public relations holding-action.”²⁵⁸ Regardless of Johnson’s intent or the veracity of his peace overtures, the president remained emphatic:

As I said last year and again last week, “it is and it will remain the policy of the United States to furnish assistance to support South Viet-Nam for as long as is required to bring Communist aggression and terrorism under control.” The military actions of the United States will be such, and only such, as serve that purpose—at the lowest possible cost in human life to our allies, to our own men, and to our adversaries, too.²⁵⁹

The administration’s next public relations effort culminated in Johnson’s Johns Hopkins speech on April 7. With this major address, the administration sought to hold the nation’s support on bombing while preparing the public for the commitment of ground troops. In the speech, LBJ justified the air war because of increased

attacks on the South, but asserted: "This is not a change of purpose. It is a change in what we believe that purpose requires."

Johnson faced an audience that numbered more than one thousand faculty and students and approximately six million television viewers. Many Johnson aides were involved in the shaping of the speech. The original outline came from National Security Advisor Bundy; it was then drafted by presidential assistants Richard Goodwin and Jack Valenti. The president adapted to his audience early in the speech: "Viet-Nam is far away from this quiet campus. We have no territory there nor do we seek any. The war is dirty, dirty and brutal and difficult. And some four hundred young men, born into an America that's bursting with opportunity and promise, have ended their lives on Viet-Nam's steaming soil."

Johnson announced that "we remain ready . . . for unconditional discussion" (not negotiations). The language choice of "discussions" rather than "negotiations" was suggested by Bundy and illustrates the reluctance of the administration to actually bargain, which would imply making some concessions.

LBJ offered a carrot to Hanoi: "I will ask the Congress to join in a billion-dollar American investment in this effort as soon as it is underway. . . . The vast Mekong River can provide food and water and power on a scale to dwarf even our own TVA [Tennessee Valley Authority]. . . . We can do all these things on a scale that's never dreamed of before." The president confidently predicted to his press secretary, Bill Moyers, "Old Ho can't turn me down." But Johnson also threatened a stick: "We will not be defeated. We will not grow tired. We will not withdraw, either openly or under the cloak of a meaningless agreement."

The speech at Johns Hopkins University was the most vigorous and expansive defense of LBJ's Vietnam policy and strategy thus far and likely was a last-ditch attempt to avoid a larger war, but LBJ also used his bully pulpit to win over his opposition; he was especially bothered by growing opposition in the Senate, as represented by Frank Church's February 17 address. Prior to delivery, Johnson invited his leading Senate critics—Church, Mansfield, McGovern, and Fulbright—to the White House to read the speech and each was impressed, at least in the short term. So was Lippmann, the leading press opponent of an expanded war.²⁶⁰

Although there was some criticism by Republican hawks and Senators Morse and Gruening, the speech was received favorably in the United States. The North Vietnamese, Soviets, and Chinese, however, denounced the speech the following day; North Vietnam listed four points needed for a settlement of the conflict. These four points remained North Vietnam's basis for a settlement throughout the war. The third point, which allowed the Communist NLF involvement in the South Vietnamese government, was one the Johnson administration was unwilling to accept because it would have likely led to a Communist South Vietnam.²⁶¹

While LBJ temporarily co-opted Fulbright at their meeting with Senator Mansfield prior to the Johns Hopkins speech, the chair of Foreign Relations came to believe the meeting was merely an attempt to get him and the majority leader "on board." Fulbright quickly realized that nothing would come from the president's proposal. Lippmann reached the same conclusion. McGovern came to believe Johns Hopkins "was primarily calculated to disarm the dissenters at home and abroad without changing policy."²⁶²

Opposition to Johnson's Vietnam policy continued to grow among the public as well as in the Senate. On April 17, 1965, ten days after his address at Johns Hopkins, an estimated fifteen thousand to twenty-five thousand Americans descended on Washington, DC, to mount an early anti-Vietnam War event sponsored by Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). The number far exceeded expectations, and at the time it was the largest antiwar protest in the history of the nation's capital. After marching near the White House for several hours, the group moved to the Washington Monument for entertainment provided by Phil Ochs, Joan Baez, Judy Collins,

and others, plus additional speakers, including Senator Gruening and journalist I. F. Stone. SDS scheduled the final speech for its president, Paul Potter.²⁶³

The SDS existed from 1960 to 1970, but its origins can be traced to the Intercollegiate Socialist Society circa 1905; the name SDS was chosen in 1960 to replace the most recent incarnation of this left-wing college group, the Student League for Industrial Democracy. The SDS became the largest student organization of the 1960s; its membership peaked at more than one hundred thousand members with more than four hundred college chapters. Initially, the SDS was interested primarily in domestic issues, particularly racism and poverty; it was drawn to the conflict in Vietnam somewhat reluctantly. Adapting an antiwar position led directly to the group's increase in membership. The SDS's demise came with splits between moderate and more radical elements that took the name of the Weathermen and came to favor a militant approach to ending the war. When the Weathermen won leadership of the SDS in 1969, they eventually shut down its national headquarters. The Weathermen were forced to go underground, and the SDS ceased to exist.²⁶⁴

By all accounts, the speech by the twenty-two-year-old Paul Potter was the highlight of the day. Fellow SDS member Todd Gitlin wrote of first meeting Potter: "I was particularly taken by Potter, a sinew-lean Midwesterner with burning globes for eyes. . . . Potter exuded a sense of having earned the right to every eloquent syllable he spoke with his own hard-won thoughtfulness." Casey Hayden of the SDS recalled that day: "The cherry trees were in bloom and everything was white. It was beautiful and I was lying on the ground when Paul spoke and I remember his speech and I remember realizing that this was a turning point." Kirkpatrick Sale reported that after Potter's speech, "The huge crowd sat still for a moment, then rose to its feet with the loudest and most sustained applause of the day." James Miller claimed: "Potter's speech managed to capture the moral passion and restless questioning that constituted the heart and soul of the early New Left." Gitlin recalled: "Paul Potter's talk was the galvanizing moment when a new Left position was launched—about the war, about honor, about decency, about the need to transform the country in some enormous way. It was ringing. It was the purest possible expression of the SDS mood."²⁶⁵ Potter referred to the administration's white paper as a "distorting or downright false document" and said, in part:

Most of us grew up thinking that the United States was a strong but humble nation, that involved itself in world affairs only reluctantly, that respected the integrity of other nations and other systems, and that engaged in wars only as a last resort. This was a nation with no large standing army, with no design for external conquest. . . .

But in recent years, the withdrawal from the hysteria of the Cold War and the development of a more aggressive, activist foreign policy have done much to force many of us to rethink attitudes that were deep and basic sentiments about our country. And now the incredible war in Vietnam has provided the razor, the terrifying sharp cutting edge that has finally severed the last vestiges of our illusion that morality and democracy are the guiding principles of American foreign policy. The saccharine self-righteous moralism that promises the Vietnamese a billion dollars while taking billions of dollars for economic and social destruction and political repression is rapidly losing what power it might ever have had to reassure us about the decency of our foreign policy. The further we explore the reality of what this country is doing and planning in Vietnam the more we are driven toward the conclusion of Senator Morse that the United States is rapidly becoming the greatest threat to world peace in the world today. This, this is a terrible and bitter insight for people who grew up as we did—and our revulsion at that insight, our refusal to accept it as inevitable or necessary, is one of the reasons that so many people have come today.²⁶⁶

At the end of Potter's address, the group marched to the Capitol, where the leaders were to present Congress with a petition to end the war. With the excitement of the speeches and music, the crowd grew unruly, and Sale writes that the chant of "Let's *all* go, LET'S ALL GO" went up. At this early stage of the antiwar movement, though, the SDS was not yet confrontational, the leaders were able to control the crowd, and the petition was delivered as planned. Two examples of the gentleness of the early antiwar movement can be heard on the tapes made of the event. The first is a woman making announcements prior to Potter's speech. She asked the crowd to "please pick up all debris at the end of this program." Right after Potter's speech, before singing, Joan Baez reminded the audience that the protest was "nonviolent."²⁶⁷

LBJ was at his ranch in Texas during Potter's speech in Washington, so the SDS held a simultaneous demonstration there so that the president would "feel an antiwar presence." About forty SDS members marched silently outside the ranch gates, carrying signs, watched carefully by Secret Service and Texas law enforcement officers. McGeorge Bundy was concerned enough about the April 17 protests to write LBJ: "We shall have a left-wing student protest rally here in Washington with pickets also at the Ranch." Bundy recommended "a strong peaceloving statement . . . [to] help cool them off ahead of time" and Johnson obliged, reading a statement to the press on the front lawn of the ranch during the protest in which he complained that his Johns Hopkins proposal for peace had been "met with tired names and slogans and a refusal to talk" by Hanoi. LBJ expressed understanding for those opposed to the bombing, but claimed that the United States had no choice, saying America would remain in South Vietnam "as long as is necessary, with the might that is required, whatever the risk and whatever the cost. . . . there is no human power capable of forcing us from Viet-Nam." In her memoir, Lady Bird Johnson wrote that her husband's statement was "planned as a countermove, a chess play," to a call from Fulbright several days earlier for a bombing halt. After the march, Bundy wrote that opponents of the war had a negative impact on foreign policy, mentioning Lippmann, Fulbright, and "marching students." Bundy asked FBI director J Edgar Hoover if Communists had played a role in this demonstration, and Hoover mistakenly told LBJ that the SDS was "largely infiltrated by communists"; shortly thereafter, the FBI began wire-tapping the SDS.²⁶⁸

The march received limited media attention, but it positioned the SDS as the major antiwar group on college campuses. Gitlin claimed they were "flooded with recruits" and uncertain how to handle the numbers. Knowing that Potter's speech was important, the SDS had it printed and widely distributed. While some versions of the address give it the title "We Must Name the System," there is no indication that Potter intended for that to be the case. But that phrase is the most remembered from the speech. Potter himself found the term "capitalism" inadequate and claimed that he was intentionally ambiguous by not naming the system. Miller reports that the "inner circle" of the SDS worked on this address and decided not to give a name to the system. Later in 1965, the new president of the SDS, Carl Oglesby, delivered another significant address at a different march on Washington and took Potter up on his call, labeling the system "corporate liberalism."²⁶⁹

The emergence of the SDS and growing antiwar sentiment on campuses and in the general society put a constraint on LBJ and later on President Richard Nixon. Even with the demise of the SDS in 1970, the potential for campuses to erupt in antiwar fervor remained a threat to an executive branch waging an unpopular war.

In early April 1965, Johnson had given permission for relatively small increases in the number of American troops being sent to Vietnam; Taylor remained the only military adviser opposed to these increases, fearing that it might "sap" the "initiative" of the government of South Vietnam. Johnson's military advisers met in Honolulu on April 20 and decided that since bombing alone wasn't gaining the hoped-for results, more ground troops were necessary; they recommended raising the level from

the current thirty-three thousand to eighty-two thousand. Ball was strongly opposed but received no support from LBJ's principal advisers.²⁷⁰

The president was unhappy with the lack of vocal support he was receiving from Congress, and on May 2 at a meeting with congressional leaders, LBJ forced their hand by asking for a \$700 million appropriation to meet military expenses in Vietnam. There was no immediate requirement for the money. Mann reports that the Department of Defense had \$2 billion that could have been shifted to meet current needs, but Johnson was tired of the "second guessing of Fulbright, Mansfield, Church, Gaylord Nelson, and McGovern"; he wanted to force a vote in support of his Vietnam policy. Publicly, the president put it this way: "This is in no way a routine appropriation. . . . Each Member of Congress who supports this request is voting to continue our effort to try to halt Communist aggression. Each is saying that the Congress and the President stand before the world in joint determination that the independence of South Viet-Nam shall be preserved and that Communist conquest shall not succeed."²⁷¹

William Bundy later called Johnson's move a "gimmick." Morse saw through LBJ's strategy, arguing that Johnson "wants to commit those senators again," as he had with the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. This led to a strident attack on Morse by Minority Leader Everett Dirksen. From this point forward, Mann concludes, Johnson's aides and his supporters in Congress viewed congressional critics as "enemies, whose motives and patriotism would be questioned." On this vote, Gaylord Nelson joined Gruening and Morse in opposition, but with minimal debate in either House, the appropriation passed 88-3 in the Senate and 408-7 in the House. Johnson was able to say publicly, "I am very proud to be signing this resolution only 3 days after it was sent to the Congress." From this time until 1973, when the United States left the war, members of Congress who opposed the conflict still voted for appropriations, fearing that not doing so would be viewed as failure to support American forces in the field. As Morse predicted, Johnson later used this vote along with the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution to refute critics who claimed he waged the war without congressional consent.²⁷²

Under international and domestic pressure, the administration tried a bombing pause on May 12, 1965. U Thant and Indian president Sarvepalli Radhakrishnam both publicly urged such a cessation in the bombing; Robert Kennedy, recently elected senator (D-NY), visited LBJ to argue for a pause, the *New York Times* editorialized for one, and a number of senators, including Church, Mansfield, and Fulbright supported it. Some supporters of escalation also wanted a cessation in the bombing, expecting no reaction to such a move by North Vietnam, thus showing the North's recalcitrance. When the North did not respond, the bombing resumed on May 18. Johnson said: "We have stopped in deference to Mansfield and Fulbright, but we don't want to do it too long else we lose our base of support. . . . We tried out their notions and got no results." McNamara later admitted that the pause was a "propaganda effort."²⁷³

Another bloodless coup occurred in early June, bringing the fifth government to Saigon within a year. Air Marshall Nguyen Cao Ky and General Nguyen Van Thieu deposed the civilian Phan Huy Quat. Quat had opposed the introduction of large numbers of American combat troops, and many in the administration were not sorry to see him go; Ky and Thieu were unabashedly pro-American. The fall of Quat led Ball to argue with Secretary of State Rusk: "You've got no government. It's impossible to win in a situation where you've got this totally fragile political base. These people are clowns." Rusk was not persuaded. Mansfield decried the loss of civilian rule under Quat. Both JFK and LBJ had traced the US obligation to South Vietnam to Eisenhower's 1954 letter of support to Diem, but Ike's support was predicated upon Diem using that aid effectively and his government passing needed reform. The coup against Quat gave Johnson a way out if he had wanted

one, but the president wasn't seeking an out that would make the United States look like a loser in the war.²⁷⁴

America's position was bleak entering the crucial months of June and July 1965. While no one knew it at the time, Thieu and Ky finally brought stability to the government of South Vietnam, ruling in tandem for the rest of the war. But they were military leaders with no mandate from the public. As Mansfield put it: "There is not a government to speak of in Saigon. In short, we are now at the point where we are no longer dealing with anyone who represents anybody in a political sense." U. Alexis Johnson, by then the deputy director of the US Embassy in Saigon, pointed out a problem with Ky when describing him as an "unguided missile," one who was erratic and who drank, womanized, and gambled. ARVN had high levels of desertion, draft avoidance was a major problem, and the South was losing the war to its Communist opponents. American bombing had accomplished little to reverse that trend.²⁷⁵

LBJ Takes America to War, June and July 1965

On June 7, McNamara received a "bombshell" from General Westmoreland, the most disturbing memorandum he received during his seven years as head of the Pentagon. More North Vietnamese regular forces were expected to arrive, and even though the Vietcong had yet to employ "their full capabilities," Westmoreland reported, the ARVN forces were not able to cope with their enemy. The military situation was grim; South Vietnam could not survive without outside forces. Westmoreland, McNamara concluded, was asking for a "dramatic and open-ended expansion of American military involvement." The secretary of defense wrote, "The issue would hang over all of us like a menacing cloud for the next seven weeks." Even Taylor was won over, writing: "The strength of the enemy offensive had completely overcome my former reluctance to use American ground troops in general combat."²⁷⁶

While Johnson and his aides used that seven weeks to determine whether to meet Westmoreland's demands, Ball, from inside the administration, Mansfield from outside, and a few others made a last-ditch effort to persuade the president to avoid the expected commitment of large-scale American forces. Kahin writes, "McGeorge Bundy, from his position of proximity in the White House, appears to have interacted most frequently with the president and spent considerable time in undercutting the arguments of Ball and Mansfield." John Burke and Fred Greenstein conclude that "Bundy consistently brought differences of viewpoint to Johnson's attention . . . [but] in advancing his own views he sometimes failed to do justice to the views of others"; Johnson aide Harry McPherson agreed that Bundy would "push . . . [his policy] subtly."²⁷⁷

Mansfield sent memos to LBJ on June 5 and 9, criticizing the advice the president was receiving from his inner circle. The majority leader predicted disaster if the Joint Chiefs got their way in bombing Hanoi and Haiphong: the world community would turn against the United States, China would become dominant in North Vietnam, and this would lead to "acceleration of the ground war in South Viet Nam." Then McNamara's prediction of a need for three hundred thousand men would become five hundred thousand if General "Giap's army does not move in full and open force across the 17th parallel," or even millions if they did. To preclude such a disastrous scenario, Mansfield called for "an immediate cease-fire and stand-fast" throughout Vietnam to get to the bargaining table. Mansfield favored using US air and naval power while committing one hundred thousand troops to hold Saigon and coastal enclaves until a settlement could be reached.²⁷⁸ Johnson read Mansfield's June 9 memo at a meeting with his advisers the next day, and McGeorge Bundy's notes indicate that those present refuted it "line by line."²⁷⁹

On June 15, Senator Fulbright entered the fray. Unlike Senator Church, Fulbright was a contemporary of President Johnson and a close associate. LBJ respected Fulbright's views on international issues; while serving as Senate majority leader, Johnson referred to Fulbright as "my Secretary of State." LBJ helped Fulbright become chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and he unsuccessfully intervened with President-elect John F. Kennedy to select Fulbright as his secretary of state. Fulbright was in basic agreement on the Johnson administration's Vietnam policy through most of 1964. In his "Old Myths and New Realities" speech on March 25 of that year, the senator was the first official to challenge a number of Cold War foreign-policy assumptions, yet he accepted Johnson's position on Vietnam. Fulbright's biographer suggests that Johnson asked Fulbright to support the administration's Vietnam policy in this speech, probably to deflect a recent speech by Senator Gruening calling for the withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam.²⁸⁰

Before the 1964 presidential election, Fulbright began warning LBJ in private against further involvement in Vietnam, but he avoided public criticism out of fear that he would lose his ability to influence US policy. As late as February 1965, Fulbright admitted to feeling insecure about the issue, as he was "in the process of learning about Vietnam." Carl Marcy, Fulbright's chief of staff on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said that once Fulbright started studying Vietnam, he "immersed himself in that area in a way that surprised me." Marcy added:

Fulbright probably knew more about the history and the background characteristics of Indochina than Rusk, or certainly than . . . McNamara or Johnson. The policy makers were so busy making policy that they had no time to read or to think. Fulbright took time to read and think, but he was not able at that time to determine policy.²⁸¹

Yet, like Senator Church, Fulbright was reluctant to publicly break with Johnson over the war, writing:

I kept thinking that I could influence [Johnson] privately. I saw him quite often. He was very friendly to me, and as long as I didn't make a *public* statement, he was willing to talk. Not only was he willing to talk, but he had Dean Rusk talk to me and he sent other people to talk to me. I kept thinking, as long as people were doing that, that one of these days I might influence them.²⁸²

In late April 1965, in an executive session of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Fulbright expressed frustration with Rusk over Johnson's lack of consultation with Congress: "It would seem to me not out of order if we are going to send thirty thousand, fifty thousand, one hundred thousand men, that the Congress might have the say about it." Yet Mann claims that Fulbright's "political loyalty" and "friendship" with LBJ prevented his expressing these mounting misgivings in public.²⁸³

On June 14, in what Mann called a "tempestuous" meeting, LBJ asked Fulbright to again stand up for Johnson's Vietnam policy, and the senator delivered a speech the following day, which was followed with an appearance on NBC's *Today Show* on June 16. By this time, Fulbright could no longer in good conscience defend administration policy as he had in 1964. The address seems quite moderate; as he told LBJ he would, Fulbright praised the president for resisting pressure to widen the war, saying: "President Johnson has resisted these pressures with steadfastness and statesmanship and remains committed to the goal of ending the war at the earliest possible time by negotiations without preconditions. In so doing, he is providing the leadership appropriate to a great nation." The Arkansan was against withdrawal, but he also opposed escalation, and wanted "to end the war at the earliest possible time by a negotiated settlement involving major concessions by both sides." In Fulbright's *Today Show*

appearance, he was asked to elaborate on what he meant by “major concessions,” and with his answer, the chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee became one of the first government leaders to advocate negotiating directly with the NLF.

Richard Nixon, Barry Goldwater, Senate minority leader Dirksen, and other Republicans attacked Fulbright’s position. In Johnson’s mind, as he was moving toward the commitment of US troops in the conflict, this speech made Fulbright a public critic of his policy. Pat Holt of the Foreign Relations Committee staff said that after this speech, “Johnson sort of scratched Fulbright off his list.” Marcy “thought it more important for [Fulbright] to keep a close relationship with Lyndon than to do anything that would break that relationship. I felt Fulbright still had access to and influence with the president, something one does not throw away lightly.” Fulbright admitted that his treatment by the president made him a stronger critic of the war, and in 1966, the senator began to use the Foreign Relations Committee to educate citizens through public hearings on Vietnam. *Newsweek* columnist Jonathan Alter claims these hearings “sharpen[ed] the debate,” and George F. Will concludes that because of NBC’s decision to televise them, Fulbright’s hearings “helped mobilize opposition to the war.”²⁸⁴

About his break from LBJ, Fulbright wrote in 1966: “A Senator who wishes to influence foreign policy must consider the . . . results of communicating privately with the Executive or, alternatively, of speaking out publicly. I do not see any great principle here: it is a matter of how one can better achieve what one hopes to achieve.”²⁸⁵ Mansfield and Ball faced the same rhetorical choice as Church and Fulbright, but made a different choice and continued to keep their criticism of Vietnam policy private. Ball explained: “I figured that I could do better by remaining on the inside. Had I quit, the story would have made the front page of the *New York Times* next day—and then I would have been promptly forgotten.” When asked about his rhetorical strategy of private criticism but public support for LBJ, Mansfield responded simply, “Evidently it did not help.”²⁸⁶ In truth, none of these men, using different rhetorical strategies, were able to influence Johnson before his decision to commit ground troops, leading to America’s only lost war.

Mansfield wrote another memo that he sent on June 22 that was rejected and again refuted by Bundy. Trying to minimize their sharp differences, the president wrote Mansfield, “Bundy’s comment persuades me once again that we agree much more than we differ.” Bundy wrote LBJ at the end of June calling Mansfield, Church, and Fulbright “*reluctant realists*” whose heart “says get out but whose heads tell them the present policy is unavoidable.” Bundy then expressed the actual goal of the administration that in the summer of 1965 made serious negotiation with North Vietnam impossible: “The problem is one of offering a plausible alternative that would assure the existence of a non-Communist South Vietnam.” Johnson told Ball in a telephone conversation, “Mansfield is unhappy.”²⁸⁷ But so was Ball.

On June 18 and July 1, Ball sent LBJ memoranda; as he often had, Johnson’s aide drew the analogy to the French involvement in Vietnam. In these memos, Ball warned that the proposed course would lead to “mounting US casualties, no assurance of a satisfactory solution, and a serious danger of escalation at the end of the road.” Ball recommended “a compromise settlement which achieves less than our stated objectives and thus cuts our losses while we still have the freedom of maneuver to do so”; rather than a “loss of face,” Ball argued that our allies would view such a position as “American maturity.” In *Vietnam-on-the-Potomac*, Moya Ball concludes that George Ball “was one of the few who recognized that negotiation involves” what Ball called in his June 18 memo “concession on our side as well as the V.C.” Rusk, William Bundy, and McNamara memoranda arrived at the same time as Ball’s and “overwhelmed” what Mann calls Ball’s “lonely pleas for caution.”²⁸⁸

Still, LBJ hesitated. On July 8–9, the president gathered the so-called Wise Men, sixteen presidential consultants on foreign affairs, including Dean Acheson, Omar

Bradley, Eugene Black, Arthur Dean, and John McCloy. The group was in general agreement that Johnson had to proceed to ground troops; that to negotiate then would be a sign of weakness. Historian Lloyd C. Gardner writes that Johnson was surprised at the “near unanimity and vigor of their enthusiasm for Vietnam as the place to hold the line against communism.” Roswell Gilpatric, a former assistant secretary of defense and member of the Wise Men, summarized their position as calling “for the application of whatever amounts of military power may be needed, perhaps as much as brought to bear in Korea fifteen years ago.” Ball had an opportunity to present his opposition but later said he had “made no impression” on the group.²⁸⁹

General Andrew Goodpaster and an ad hoc study group were sent to Vietnam for a military assessment in early July 1965 to answer the question, “Can we win?” Their report was issued on July 14 and the answer was a “conditional affirmative.” The day the Goodpaster report was issued, the president sent McNamara with a study group to South Vietnam for a report on the situation there. According to Gibbons, McGeorge Bundy received a draft of that report, the day *before* McNamara left for Vietnam, which was apparently the norm for McNamara, who viewed such trips as “theater.” McNamara returned on July 20 and submitted the report to LBJ. The report recommended meeting Westmoreland’s troop request, but it appears Johnson had reached that decision before seeing the McNamara report. Further, it advocated calling up reserves and National Guard troops, something the president was loath to do. The report also advocated increasing Rolling Thunder from twenty-five hundred bombing attacks per month to four thousand or more.²⁹⁰

In the final week before Johnson announced his escalation decision, Ball remembered, he was joined by Johnson civilian adviser Clark Clifford in opposition to Westmoreland’s troop request, writing, “Clifford emerged as a formidable comrade on my side of the barricades.” Mansfield started the week with a Senate speech, calling for reconvening the 1961 Geneva Conference, fearing a war that could last ten years, predicting: “We are in for an ordeal of indefinite duration and increasing sacrifice which will persist until the problem can be resolved at the conference table.”²⁹¹

On the same day Mansfield delivered that speech, Johnson met with his top advisers in what Kahin considers the “most crucial” meeting of the week, and from the discussion before Johnson’s arrival, it is clear that it was expected that LBJ would agree to the Westmoreland/McNamara troop request. The president demanded Ball’s alternatives even after his aide said: “I have had my day in court.” Ball said, “We cannot win,” suggesting the United States make proposals to the South Vietnamese government that it could not accept; he predicted it would ask us to leave, take a neutralist position, and eventually fall under the control of North Vietnam. Johnson continued to fear the loss of American credibility; McGeorge Bundy, Rusk, and Lodge agreed with him. Horace Busby, a Johnson aide, told the president after this debate: “Given his point of view, Ball is impressively clear-headed and well organized,” but he saw Ball as captive to Korea and the French “fiasco.”²⁹²

The next day, July 22, Johnson met with the military leadership and his top aides. While the president gave the impression that he was still struggling with his decision, the way he described the three alternatives show that he was not. He called Ball’s proposal “the bugging out approach” and the status quo policy as a way to “lose slowly.” The third approach would add “100,000 men—recognizing that may not be enough—and adding more next year.” The military advisers agreed on the third approach, and fear for the loss of US prestige was their major reason. Yet none guaranteed success. Admiral David McDonald admitted, “We can’t win an all out war,” while McNamara expressed “the most extreme version of the domino theory” that Clifford had ever heard.

After this meeting, Johnson met with his top advisers, and by the end of the session, the decision was made to go with the third option. John McCloy posed the question, “Would we be willing to take a Tito government or a VC victory?” Bundy’s

answer suggests a lack of foresight: "That's where our plan begins to unravel." Clifford and Ball met afterward and were not optimistic. In talking of Johnson's major advisers, Clifford said: "Individuals sometimes become so bound up in a certain course it is difficult to know where objectivity stops and personal involvement begins." Later that day, Johnson predicted: "You'll never hold Fulbright, Mansfield, Church."²⁹³

Hoping that LBJ's decision was not yet set in stone, Mansfield sent another memo on July 23. The majority leader repeated earlier arguments but warned the president of the danger to what LBJ cared the most about, that divisiveness at home would threaten the Great Society programs. This time, being a team player who had had his day in court, Ball prepared the response to rebut Mansfield's arguments. Mansfield was not alone. Supreme Court justice Arthur Goldberg, who was soon to be LBJ's United Nations ambassador, prodded the president to take the matter to the UN. Harvard economist John Kenneth Galbraith, who had earlier cautioned Kennedy about his Vietnam policy, wrote Johnson: "Much official crap to the contrary, . . . Vietnam is of no great intrinsic importance. Had it gone Communist after World War II, we would be just as strong as now and we would never waste a thought on it." Galbraith wanted LBJ to have his aides "stop saying the future of mankind, the United States and human liberty is being decided in Vietnam," because it was not.²⁹⁴

Johnson met with McNamara, Clifford, and Goldberg at Camp David on July 25. Clifford argued with prescience that the United States could lose fifty thousand men and billions of dollars that could "ruin us." Goldberg sided with Clifford in opposition to McNamara's proposal to call up the reserves. Clifford hoped to debate McNamara point by point, but Johnson ended the discussion; he was committed to escalation.²⁹⁵

The next day, Johnson announced to his top advisers his decision to commit ground troops. Mansfield continued to fight the decision, talking with LBJ the morning of the twenty-seventh and then meeting with Senators Fulbright, Richard Russell (D-GA), Aiken, John Sherman Cooper (R-KY), and John Sparkman (D-AL). Gibbons argued that these six Senate "Wise Men" "constituted an extraordinary 'privy council,'" and these senators offered Johnson a way to avoid a wider war. According to Kahin, the nineteen-point memo they submitted to the president was "considerably more moderate" than the position Mansfield had expressed that morning.²⁹⁶

The semiconsensus of the six expressed disappointment with McNamara's handling of the war, while the seventh point suggested a dilemma: "The main perplexity in the Vietnamese situation is that even if you win, totally, you still do not come out well. What have you achieved? It is by no means a 'vital' area of U.S. concern." The six were in "full agreement that insofar as Viet Nam is concerned we are deeply enmeshed in a place where we ought not to be; that the situation is rapidly going out of control; and that every effort should be made to extricate ourselves." Johnson had McNamara respond to eighteen of the points; the president himself replied to the nineteenth, calling McNamara "the best Secretary of Defense in the history of the country."²⁹⁷

On the same day the Senate Wise Men were meeting, Democratic senators who lacked influence with the president spoke on the Senate floor. McGovern deplored the cost of the coming war and pushed for the enclave approach until the United States could get to the negotiating table. Church and Gruening delivered speeches that agreed with the South Dakotan, followed by Morse, who as usual, provided the most strident criticism of the president.²⁹⁸

Just before 6:00 p.m. on July 27, LBJ touched base with the National Security Council prior to his scheduled meeting with the elected congressional leadership, making Mansfield the only "Wise Man" in attendance. McGeorge Bundy wrote in his notes of the NSC meeting that LBJ's "unspoken object was to protect his legislative program."

At the congressional meeting, Johnson dismissed three of the five options open to him: all-out war, withdrawing from Vietnam, and staying with the status quo of eighty thousand troops. The president also dismissed the fourth option: call a state of emergency, ask Congress for money, request authority to call up the reserves, and send more combat battalions. LBJ rejected that option for fear of alarming the Soviets and Chinese. The option he selected was to commit only the number of troops requested by Westmoreland. No additional money would be asked for until January, and in the meantime, he would seek a diplomatic solution.²⁹⁹

Johnson stubbornly claimed that this was not a change in policy. The senators and representatives present were so supportive that Gardner compared their comments to "Fourth of July speeches," and Bundy recorded in his notes, "The Leadership seems might hawky so far." Gardner mentions one exception. Near the end of the meeting, Mansfield spoke, saying later, "I was not convinced by those who spoke before me. I wanted my views, in opposition, on the record." Puffing on his pipe, Mansfield pulled a three-page prepared statement from his pocket and read at least some of it, repeating his major arguments from numerous memoranda and conversations with Johnson. The majority leader pledged to support Johnson's policy as best he could, but predicted "that escalation begets escalation" and was highly critical of the administration's efforts to get to the bargaining table, saying: "We have offered too little, too late in the way of bringing about meaningful negotiations in this situation and we have not, to say the least, encouraged the French who could have and may still be able to play the decisive role in this connection." Johnson did not respond; he merely nodded, but later wrote, "As always, [Mansfield] expressed his opinion candidly."³⁰⁰

Johnson aide Jack Valenti, who was in attendance, wrote:

Mansfield's discontent was remarkably prophetic. The majority leader never wavered in his assessment of Vietnam and its deadly impact on the nation. What might have happened if the president had listened to Mike Mansfield and given his views more weight in his own mind? Mansfield's assay of Indochina was probably closer to the mark than other public men, with the possible exception of George Ball. . . .

With Mansfield's comments to the president, the meeting had come to its end. The die was cast. The decision taken.³⁰¹

The next day, President Johnson announced his decision at a press conference at which Vietnam was one of several issues discussed, including the Great Society, before he fielded questions. Most questions concerned Vietnam, but the format avoided the media scrutiny a presidential address would have invited. When asked, "[Does] sending additional forces to Viet-Nam imply any change in the existing policy of relying mainly on the South Vietnamese to carry out offensive operations and using American forces to guard American installations and to act as an emergency backup?" LBJ asserted disingenuously, "It does not imply any change in policy whatever." The president continued to stick with McGeorge Bundy's choice of "unconditional discussions" from the Johns Hopkins speech, not "negotiations," proving Mansfield's charge that the United States "offered too little, too late" to find a way to the bargaining table.

LBJ did not give the Joint Chiefs of Staff all that they wanted, which would have been option four explained at his July 27 meeting with congressional leaders. With a limited commitment, Johnson believed he could find a negotiated settlement and both pass and fund his Great Society program. As Moss put it, he chose to fight the war on the "side," not raising taxes, not explaining clearly to the America public what he hoped to accomplish, not calling up the reserves or National Guards, not seeking

an actual declaration of war from Congress. In his prepared remarks, Johnson said in part:

We did not choose to be the guardians at the gate, but there is no one else.

. . . We intend to convince the Communists that we cannot be defeated by force of arms or by superior power. . . .

I have today ordered to Viet-Nam . . . forces which will raise our fighting strength from 75,000 to 125,000 men almost immediately. Additional forces will be needed later, and they will be sent as requested.

. . . but we will not surrender and we will not retreat.

. . . I do not find it easy to send the flower of our youth, our finest young men, into battle.³⁰²

The year had started with 23,000 US troops “in country”; it would end with 184,000. Johnson had listened to the advisers he had pleaded with to stay on after the death of Kennedy, over Ball, the lone administration dissenter. Johnson could have listened to old Senate hands like Mansfield, Fulbright, and Russell, but did not. Clifford gave him a new voice of caution in the last week before escalation, but his advice was rejected, too. LBJ knew that he was endangering his Great Society legislation, but he feared attacks from Republican hawks as he remembered earlier charges about “who lost China,” and he was not willing to be the president who lost Indochina. Mann writes: “Quietly and without alarm, Johnson had launched the nation on nine costly years of warfare in Vietnam. . . . As Johnson would soon come to realize, to his profound and everlasting regret, he had taken his country into war without a clear mandate from either the people or the Congress.”³⁰³

Conclusion

We have traced an early antecedent rhetoric leading to the Vietnam War that has been characterized by a step-by-step rhetorical march to war in Southeast Asia. Cold War presidents and their successive administrations established by doctrine, design, and symbolic appeals an anti-Communism crusade that led inexorably to US participation in a ground war in Vietnam. In this instance the history and rhetoric are not easily separated.

During the Truman administration, “What seized the country’s emerging anti-Communist elite was the fear that the real Soviet danger, one that rendered military aggression irrelevant, lay in the limitless promise of Soviet ideological expansion. Soviet rhetoric had long predicted Communism’s ultimate conquest of the world.” In addition, there was the fear that the Soviet Marxist doctrine would move them to pursue “the ultimate destruction of capitalist states.”³⁰⁴

Eisenhower would follow Truman’s lead. As Shawn J. Perry-Giles indicates, Eisenhower identified “communism as humanity’s primary enemy,” and his administration pressed a “thorough and ambitious crusade against it.” Moreover, administration officials “worried that any Soviet actions, which might be viewed as a step toward peaceful resolution of the Cold War, would thwart America’s Cold War aims.”³⁰⁵

In assessing President Kennedy, Steven R. Goldzwig and George N. Dionisopoulos note: “Perhaps his most perilous legacy lay in his determination to not only stay the course but up the ante in Vietnam.” The arc of Kennedy’s foreign policy public address “demonstrate[d] Kennedy’s determination to contest the Communist menace whenever and wherever it reached its lengthy and multiple tentacles.”³⁰⁶

Offering an incisive evaluation and indictment of Lyndon Johnson, John M. Murphy has noted, "Where Vietnam was concerned, Lyndon Johnson bound himself to his forebears. He cited the decisions of past presidents as the rationale for his policy in Vietnam. Such citations, in turn, led him to adopt a deductive structure for most of his speeches, an argument that demanded acceptance for his policy in Vietnam. The past was a sacred script; Lyndon Johnson would not be a textual deviant. His slavish imitation of past conventions undermined his present authority. He appeared a prisoner to the past, a president who could not act alone or think through the problems that faced him."³⁰⁷

What is equally clear is that Johnson's compass was not set by his administration alone. Every US president from 1945 to 1965 followed largely the same script; each called for an increased commitment to Vietnam rhetorically, politically, economically, and militarily. The escalation of the Vietnam War was the product of a nation mired in Cold War fears of Communism and assessments of developing nation-states as particularly vulnerable to Chinese and Soviet influence. The domino theory was reinforced rhetorically by successive US presidential administrations as Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson became obsessed with fending off geopolitical "losses" to the Reds. Dissenting voices both high and low were ignored. In the process, a great nation soon found itself promoting its treasured ideals of democracy, freedom, and peace through the iron exercise of its unquestioned military might. The bellicosity of the effort began to overshadow the stated goal, sapping the American spirit and causing the "enemy" to dig in deeper for the long haul. The end of US military involvement would have to await the onset of another US administration as the cost in lives, treasure, and credibility tore at the American fabric and laid waste to a small country. Vietnam, a tiny nation that had largely been in the throes of a civil war, soon found itself in the eye of the hurricane of international Cold War machinations. The United States was poised for ten more years of war and additional decades of wrenching self-doubt.³⁰⁸

Notes

1. As quoted in John Barry, "Petraeus's Next Battle," *Newsweek*, July 25, 2011, 35.
2. As quoted in William Conrad Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships*, Part I, 1945–1960 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 52, 264, 313, 320–321; and Robert Mann, *A Grand Delusion: America's Descent into Vietnam* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 77, 84–85, 104. See also Robert Scheer, *How the United States Got Involved in Vietnam* (Santa Barbara, CA: Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, 1965), 33; and James Arnold, *The First Domino: Eisenhower, the Military, and America's Intervention in Vietnam* (New York: William Morrow, 1991), 20.
3. George Donelson Moss, *Vietnam: An American Ordeal*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994), 50. See also George McT. Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), 33.
4. Philip Wander, "The Rhetoric of American Foreign Policy," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70.4 (1984): 339–361.
5. Richard A. Cherwitz, "The Contributory Effect of Rhetorical Discourse: A Study of Language-in-Use," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66.1 (1980): 33–50. For Cherwitz "language-in-use" "denotes the *form* and *substance* of verbal statements made by opinion leaders, institutional representatives, members of Congress, and the media. See also Robert L. Ivie, "Presidential Motives for War," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 60 (1974): 337–345.
6. As quoted in George Donelson Moss, "Roosevelt's Memo to Secretary of State Cordell Hull, January 24, 1944," in *A Vietnam Reader: Sources and Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1991), 31–32.

7. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part I, 4–16, 25; Robert P. Newman, *Owen Lattimore and the “Loss” of China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 84, 96; Kahin, *Intervention*, 3–4; Robert D. Schulzinger, *A Time for War: The United States and Vietnam, 1941–1975* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 12–17; and Moss, *Vietnam*, 22–23, 28.
8. As quoted in Moss, *Vietnam*, 65; US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter cited as *FRUS*), 1948, vol. 6 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1974), 48; Kahin, *Intervention*, 7, 27; David Halberstam, *Ho* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1987), 13; and Robert Shaplen, “Southeast Asia: What’s What and Who’s Who,” Editorial Short (2nd draft), Jan. 20, 1949, 15, Shaplen Papers, MCHC 81-063, Box 63, Folder 1 SHSW, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison. See also Schulzinger, *A Time for War*, 30, 33; and Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part I, 48.
9. Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, rev. ed. (New York: Viking, 1991), 109–110, 130–138; Halberstam, *Ho*, 12–61; Moss, *Vietnam*, 19; and Peter DeCaro, *Rhetoric of Revolt: Ho Chi Minh’s Discourse for Revolution* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 9–16.
10. As quoted in Archimedes L. A. Patti, *Why Viet Nam? Prelude to America’s Albatross* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 45–58, 124–129, 250–253, 559 n. 2. See also Moss, *Vietnam*, 24–28; Kahin, *Intervention*, 7; Karnow, *Vietnam* (1991), 141, 146–163; Robert Shaplen, “The Enigma of Ho Chi Minh,” *The Reporter*, January 27, 1955, 11–19; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part I, 2–3; and DeCaro, *Rhetoric of Revolt*, 16–17. For a transcript of Ho’s speech, see Gregory Allen Olson, ed., *Landmark Speeches on the Vietnam War* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2010), 15–18.
11. Ted Morgan, *Valley of Death: The Tragedy at Dien Bien Phu That Led America into the Vietnam War* (New York: Random House, 2010), 66–71; and Karnow, *Vietnam* (1991), 10, 150–151.
12. “Ho Chi Minh’s Letter to Secretary of State James F. Byrnes, October 22, 1945,” in Moss, *A Vietnam Reader*, 35–36; Moss, *Vietnam*, 36–37, 68 n. 13; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part I, 22; and Kahin, *Intervention*, 22.
13. Moss, *Vietnam*, 32–38; Schulzinger, *A Time for War*, 25, 28–31; and Kahin, *Intervention*, 15.
14. Schulzinger, *A Time for War*, 17; Kahin, *Intervention*, 3, 4, 67; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part I, preface, 14, 22; Moss, *Vietnam*, 28, 45; and George C. Herring, *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950–1975*, 4th ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2002), 10–14.
15. As quoted in Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 23, 72. See also Michael Gravel, ed., *Pentagon Papers*, vol. 1 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 40; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part I, 61–62, 65, 74, 87; Schulzinger, *A Time for War*, 37–38; Karnow, *Vietnam* (1991), 190–192; and Martin J. Medhurst, “Eisenhower and the Crusade for Freedom: The Rhetorical Origins of a Cold War Campaign,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 27.4 (1997): 647.
16. As quoted in Morgan, *Valley of Death*, 111–112. See also Gravel, *Pentagon Papers*, 40; Moss, *Vietnam*, 41–42, 46; and Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part I, 50.
17. Newman, *Owen Lattimore*, 153, 160, 184, 309–310; and Newman, “Lethal Rhetoric: The Selling of the China Myths,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 61.2 (1975): 119.
18. Kennedy came to regret his strong rhetoric on the issue. See Newman, *Owen Lattimore*, 193, 504, 552, 604 n. 31.
19. As quoted in Newman, “Lethal Rhetoric,” 113, 126; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part I, 69, 71, 193; and Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 21–29, 97–98, 307–308. See also Newman, *Owen Lattimore*, 161, 309–310, 480; Kahin, *Intervention*, 67, 313; Moss, *Vietnam*, 47; and Gregory A. Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam: A Study in Rhetorical Adaptation* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1995), 15, 127–128.
20. As quoted in Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part I, 26–34, 73. See also Denise M. Bostdorff, *Proclaiming the Truman Doctrine: The Cold War Call to Arms* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 121, 142–152; Karnow, *Vietnam* (1991), 190; Moss, *Vietnam*, 48, 50; Kahin, *Intervention*, 27, 29, 67; and Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 12.
21. “Statement by the President on the Situation in Korea, June 27, 1950,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Harry S. Truman, 1950* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1965), 492 (hereafter cited as *Public Papers*).
22. Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 38–49.
23. As quoted in Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part I, 70, 80–81; Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 90; and Joseph Buttinger, *Vietnam: A Political History* (New York: Praeger, 1968), 324–325. See also Moss, *Vietnam*, 49, 61, 76; Morgan, *Valley of Death*, 115–116, 120–130; and Schulzinger, *A Time for War*, 47, 60.
24. See, for example, “Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union, January 9, 1952,” *Public Papers, 1952*, 13.

25. Robert H. Ferrell, ed., *The Eisenhower Diaries* (New York: Norton, 1981), 190; and Ira Chernus, *General Eisenhower: Ideology and Discourse* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2002), 341 n. 16.
26. Conversation with Malcolm Muir on/about Colonialism, May 25, 1955, Whitman File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Diary Series, Box 5, Folder 2, Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas (hereafter cited as DDE Library). See also Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part I, 120–121; and Gregory A. Olson, "Eisenhower and the Indochina Problem," in *Eisenhower's War of Words: Rhetoric and Leadership*, ed. Martin J. Medhurst (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994), 97–99.
27. As quoted in Harry S. Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, vol. 2 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956), 519; and Arnold, *The First Domino*, 83. See also Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part I, 88, 118, 120; Olson, "Eisenhower and the Indochina Problem," 97–98; Kahin, *Intervention*, 38, 42, 92 and Medhurst, "Eisenhower and the Crusade for Freedom," 660.
28. Arnold, *The First Domino*, 101; and Olson, "Eisenhower and the Indochina Problem," 99–101.
29. As quoted in *FRUS, 1952–1954, Indochina*, Vol. 13, Part I (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1982), 782. See also Arnold, *The First Domino*, 101; Olson, "Eisenhower and the Indochina Problem," 99–101; and Morgan, *Valley of Death*, 183.
30. Moss, *Vietnam*, 50; and Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part I, 22.
31. *Congressional Record*, July 1, 1953, 7779–7780. See also Barry M. Goldwater with Jack Casserly, *Goldwater* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 97; and Lee Edwards, *Goldwater: The Man Who Made a Revolution* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 1995), 89.
32. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part I, 130.
33. Memorandum for the Secretary / Memorandum of conversation with the President, July 27, 1953, John Foster Dulles, White House memoranda, Box 1, DDE Library; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part I, 129–135; Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 22; Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 110–113; Morgan, *Valley of Death*, 172–173; and *Congressional Record*, July 1, 1953, 7779–7789, July 29, 1953, 10234–10235.
34. "Remarks at the Governors' Conference, Seattle, Washington, August 4, 1953," *Public Papers, 1953*, 541.
35. Chernus, *General Eisenhower*, 29, 162, 241, 243, 341 n. 16; Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 73, 108, 124; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part I, 67, 96, 178; Schulzinger, *A Time for War*, 66; and Kahin, *Intervention*, 40.
36. As quoted in Morgan, *Valley of Death*, 133–167. See also Moss, *Vietnam*, 50–53.
37. As quoted in Morgan, *Valley of Death*, xvi, 72, 168–256. See also Herring, *America's Longest War*, 32–45; and Moss, *Vietnam*, 54–57.
38. As quoted in "The President's News Conference of March 17, 1954," *Public Papers, 1954*, 327 and *FRUS, 1952–1954*, 13:952. See also Olson, "Eisenhower and the Indochina Problem," 102–104.
39. As quoted in Mansfield, "Last Chance in Indochina," press release, rough draft, n.d., and unlabeled, Mansfield Papers, Series XIII, Box 6, #2, Missoula, Montana (hereafter cited as MP); Olson, "Eisenhower and the Indochina Problem," 102–104; and Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 134–135. See also Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part I, 155–163; Morgan, *Valley of Death*, 171; and Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 25–29.
40. As quoted in Memorandum of Conversation with the President, March 24, 1954, John Foster Dulles, White House Memoranda, Box 1, Folder 4, DDE Library; and Olson, "Eisenhower and the Indochina Problem," 104–107, 112. See also Moss, *Vietnam*, 55–56; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part I, 209–210; and Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 128.
41. As quoted in Memorandum for the Secretary's File, April 5, 1954, John Foster Dulles, Subject Series, Box 9, Folder 2, DDE Library; Olson, "Eisenhower and the Indochina Problem," 107–108; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part I, 190–197. See also *FRUS, 1952–1954*, 13:1230.
42. As quoted in Richard Nixon, *Memoirs* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 151.
43. As quoted in *Congressional Record*, April 6, 1954, 4671–4681; and Herring, *America's Longest War*, 43.
44. *Congressional Record*, April 6, 1954, 4674; and Kahin, *Intervention*, 36.
45. *Congressional Record*, April 6, 1954, 4674.
46. *Congressional Record*, April 6, 1954, 4672–4673, 4676–4677; and Olson, "Eisenhower and the Indochina Problem," 108–109.
47. "The President's News Conference of April 7th, 1954," *Public Papers, 1954*, 383.
48. "The President's News Conference of April 7th, 1954," 389.
49. "Address at Transylvania College, Lexington, Kentucky, April 23, 1954," *Public Papers, 1954*, 420.

50. "Remarks at the 42d Annual Meeting of the United States Chamber of Commerce, April 26, 1954," *Public Papers, 1954*, 421.
51. Morgan, *Valley of Death*, 540–541; Karnow, *Vietnam* (1991), 10–11, 182; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part I, 158; Herring, *America's Longest War*, 45; and Moss, *Vietnam*, 56.
52. As quoted in U. Alexis Johnson with Jef Olivarius McAllister, *The Right Hand of Power* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984), 202; and Olson, "Eisenhower and the Indochina Problem," 115–116, 132 n. 60. For evidence that Ho would have won the 1956 election, see Kahin, *Intervention*, 53, 61, 88–92; Volney D. Hurd, Letter to Mansfield, March 29, 1954, MP, XIII, 6; Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 83, 84; Moss, *Vietnam*, 81; and Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 27.
53. Morse was a Republican senator from 1945 to 1952, when he became an independent. On February 17, 1955, Morse joined the Democrats. See *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, 84th Cong., 1st sess., 1955, vol. 11 (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly News Features, 1955), 19.
54. As quoted in David L. Anderson, "No More Koreas': Eisenhower and Vietnam," in *Dwight D. Eisenhower: Soldier, President, Statesman*, ed. Joann P. Krieg (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1987), 278. See also Moss, *Vietnam*, 73–74; and Olson, "Eisenhower and the Indochina Problem," 108–117.
55. As quoted in Scheer, *How the United States Got Involved*, 14–15. See also Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 19–21, 42–43, 268 n. 18; John Ernst, *Forging a Fateful Alliance: Michigan State University and the Vietnam War* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1998), 9–10; William O. Douglas, interview with John Stewart, November 9, 1967, 15, JFK Oral History Project, John F. Kennedy Library, Boston; and Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part I, 93.
56. As quoted in Ellen Hammer, *A Death in November* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1987), 49; and Thomas Boettcher, *Vietnam: The Valor and the Sorrow* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1985), 107–109.
57. Wayne Morse, *Submission of the Vietnam Conflict to the United Nations*, Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate on S. Con. Res. 44 and 180, U.S. 90th Cong., 1st sess., S. Rept. (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1967), 127.
58. As quoted in *Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, 1954 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1977), 6:115, 141–145; and *FRUS, 1952–1954*, Part I, 1014, and Part II, 1538–1540. See also Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 26, 30.
59. As quoted in Francis Valeo, interview with Gregory Olson, Washington, DC, May 17, 1991, and vanden Heuvel, letter to Mansfield, June 17, 1954, MP, XIII, 6.
60. As quoted in Mansfield, *Report on Indochina*, U.S. 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., S. Rept. (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, October 15, 1954), 11, 14; and Chester Cooper, *The Lost Crusade* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1970), 134. See also Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 39–44; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part I, 285–287; and Joseph G. Morgan, *The Vietnam Lobby: The American Friends of Vietnam, 1955–1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 16.
61. "Letter to the President of the Council of Ministers of Viet-Nam Regarding Assistance for That Country, October 25, 1954," *Public Papers, 1954*, 949.
62. Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 30, 44–62, 64–67; and Morgan, *The Vietnam Lobby*, 38.
63. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part I, 301–305; and Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 50–52, 64–67.
64. Morgan, *The Vietnam Lobby*, 31–45, 50. See also Letter to Senator John F. Kennedy from Angier Biddle Duke, regarding conference on Vietnam, April 25, 1956; Program for "America's Stake in Vietnam," a conference sponsored by AFV, June 1, 1956 and News release regarding "Conference on Vietnam," June 1, 1956, Folder 20, Box 04, Douglas Pike Collection: Other Manuscripts—American Friends of Vietnam, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University; and John F. Kennedy, "America's Stake in Vietnam: The Cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia," *Vital Speeches of the Day*, August 1, 1956, 617–619.
65. Tran Van Chuong, Diem's ambassador to the United States and the father-in-law of Diem's brother and close adviser, Nhu.
66. As quoted in Kennedy, "America's Stake in Vietnam," 617–619. See also John F. Kennedy, *The Strategy of Peace*, ed. Allan Nevins (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), 62–65; Steven R. Goldzwig and George N. Dionisopoulos, "Legitimizing Liberal Credentials for the Presidency: John F. Kennedy and *The Strategy of Peace*," *Southern Communication Journal* 60 (1995): 312–331; and Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 66–67, 77–79.
67. As quoted in Kahin, *Intervention*, 59–65, 88–92; and "The American Response to the Geneva Declarations, July 21, 1954," in Moss, *A Vietnam Reader*, 42–43, 50. See also Moss, *Vietnam*, 80–81, 86; and Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part I, 268–269, 299–300.
68. Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 75–76; John Osborne, "The Tough Miracle Man of Vietnam," *Life*, May 13, 1957, 164; Morgan, *The Vietnam Lobby*, 6–7, 18, 50–52; and Ernst, *Forging a Fateful Alliance*, xi–xiii, 1.

69. As quoted in Arnold, *The First Domino*, 289–290, 299, 342, 361, 371, 378. See also Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 214; Moss, *Vietnam*, 101; and Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 77–79.
70. As quoted in Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part I, 339–341; and Kahin, *Intervention*, 122–123.
71. As quoted in Mansfield, telegram to Diem, November 12, 1960, MP, XIII, 48, #2; and Fishel, letter to Mansfield, November 12, 1960, MP, XIII, 47, #11. See also Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part I, 342–343; and Kahin, *Intervention*, 123–126.
72. As quoted in Gravel, *Pentagon Papers*, 253. See also Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part I, 333–339; Kahin, *Intervention*, 109–111; and Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 77–79, 83–85.
73. “Address at Gettysburg College Convocation: ‘The Importance of Understanding,’ April 4, 1959,” *Public Papers*, 1959, 312–313.
74. Karnow, *Vietnam* (1991), 10–11; Kahin, *Intervention*, 111–121; and Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 90–96.
75. William Conrad Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships*, Part II, 1961–1964 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1984), v.
76. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 998.
77. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part II, v.
78. Thomas Brown, *JFK: History of an Image* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 34.
79. Vito N. Silvestri, *Becoming JFK: A Profile in Communication* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), 235.
80. Denise Bostdorff and Steven Goldzwig, “Idealism and Pragmatism in American Foreign Rhetoric: The Case of John F. Kennedy and Vietnam,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 24 (1994): 515.
81. As quoted in Bostdorff and Goldzwig, “Idealism and Pragmatism,” 516.
82. Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Viking Press, 1983), 247.
83. Bostdorff and Goldzwig, “Idealism and Pragmatism,” 516.
84. Steven R. Goldzwig and George N. Dionisopoulos, “*In a Perilous Hour*”: *The Public Address of John F. Kennedy* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 91.
85. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part II, 8; and Arnold, *The First Domino*, 375–376.
86. As quoted in Clark Clifford with Richard Holbrooke, *Counsel to the President* (New York: Random House, 1991), 342–344. See also Dean Rusk as told to Richard Rusk, *As I Saw It* (New York: Norton, 1990), 428; and Kahin, *Intervention*, 127.
87. “The President’s News Conference, March 23, 1961,” *Public Papers*, 1961, 213, 214.
88. “The President’s News Conference, March 23, 1961,” 216.
89. Moss, *Vietnam*, 101–104, 111–112; and Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part II, 11.
90. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part II, 41; and Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 229–232.
91. Goldzwig and Dionisopoulos, *In a Perilous Hour*, 91.
92. As quoted in Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 229–232, 240–242, 250; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part II, 23–25, 48; and Rusk, *As I Saw It*, 221.
93. As quoted in William J. Rust, *Kennedy in Vietnam* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1985), 24.
94. Rust, *Kennedy in Vietnam*, 25, 28.
95. Orrin Schwab, *Defending the Free World: John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, and the Vietnam War, 1961–1965* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 9.
96. *FRUS, 1961–1963, Vietnam*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1988), 1–23; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part II, 11–13; Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 96–97; Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 227–233; and Moss, *Vietnam*, 112–113.
97. As quoted in Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 232–233.
98. “The President’s New Conference, May 5, 1961,” *Public Papers*, 1961, 354.
99. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part II, 41; and Schwab, *Defending the Free World*, 15.
100. Rust, *Kennedy in Vietnam*, 34.
101. John M. Newman, *JFK and Vietnam: Deception, Intrigue and the Struggle for Power* (New York: Time Warner, 1992), 70, 71.
102. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part II, 42.
103. Karnow, *Vietnam* (1983), 250.
104. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part II, 42.
105. Karnow, *Vietnam* (1983), 250.
106. Rust, *Kennedy in Vietnam*, 34.
107. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part II, 42–43.
108. All quotations from the report taken from William A. Williams, Thomas McCormick, Lloyd Gardner, and Walter LaFeber, *America in Vietnam: A Documentary History* (New York: Norton, 1985), 191–194.

109. Newman, *JFK and Vietnam*, 91.
110. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part II, 45; and Schwab, *Defending the Free World*, 15.
111. Newman, *JFK and Vietnam*, 107.
112. Schwab, *Defending the Free World*, 18.
113. Karnow, *Vietnam* (1983), 250–251.
114. Newman, *JFK and Vietnam*, 125.
115. Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 244.
116. David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Random House, 1972), 209.
117. Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 245.
118. Rust, *Kennedy in Vietnam*, 49.
119. Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 245.
120. Schwab, *Defending the Free World*, 23.
121. Newman, *JFK and Vietnam*, 36.
122. Newman, *JFK and Vietnam*, 136–137.
123. Rust, *Kennedy in Vietnam*, 50, 51.
124. Newman, *JFK and Vietnam*, 138.
125. Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 252.
126. Newman, *JFK and Vietnam*, 139.
127. "The President's News Conference, November 29, 1961," *Public Papers, 1961*, 756–757.
128. "Exchange of Messages with the President of the Republic of Viet-Nam, December 15, 1961," *Public Papers, 1961*, 801.
129. Newman, *JFK and Vietnam*, 204.
130. Newman, *JFK and Vietnam*, 320.
131. Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 261.
132. Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 261, 255.
133. Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 260.
134. Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 24.
135. Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 260.
136. Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 25.
137. Schwab, *Defending the Free World*, 43.
138. Karnow, *Vietnam* (1983), 255.
139. Rust, *Kennedy in Vietnam*, 66, 67.
140. Schwab, *Defending the Free World*, 44.
141. "The President's New Conference, December 12, 1962," *Public Papers, 1962*, 546.
142. Schwab, *Defending the Free World*, 53.
143. Karnow, *Vietnam* (1983), 257, 258.
144. Schwab, *Defending the Free World*, 52.
145. Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 260.
146. Newman, *JFK and Vietnam*, 320.
147. "Remarks in Harrisburg at a Democratic State Finance Committee Dinner, September 20, 1962," *Public Papers, 1962*, 696.
148. Schwab, *Defending the Free World*, 40.
149. Schwab, *Defending the Free World*, 39.
150. Karnow, *Vietnam* (1983), 259.
151. James Reston, "The Undeclared War in South Vietnam," *New York Times*, February 14, 1962, 34.
152. Members of the administration were "mindful of the political ramifications of increased media scrutiny in Vietnam," and there was some discussion of restricting access to the battlefield, while keeping them "informed" through "briefings in Saigon by our military or Embassy." Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 257–258.
153. Jack Raymond, "G.O.P. Asks Candor on Vietnam War," *New York Times*, February 14, 1962, 1.
154. "The President's New Conference, February 14, 1962," *Public Papers, 1962*, 136–137.
155. "Engagement in Saigon," *New Republic*, March 12, 1962, 3.
156. "Z," "The War in Vietnam: We Have Not Been Told the Whole Truth," *New Republic*, March 12, 1962, 25.
157. Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 262.
158. In a letter to Kennedy, Galbraith facetiously asked to have the name and address of the "man in your administration who decides what countries are strategic." Rust, *Kennedy in Vietnam*, 66, 70.
159. Newman, *JFK and Vietnam*, 236.
160. Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 267.

161. As quoted in Olson, *Landmark Speeches*, 29. See also David, Kaiser, *American Tragedy: Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2000), 179.
162. Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 262.
163. Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 99; and Olson, *Landmark Speeches*, 30.
164. Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 264.
165. Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 265. Olson observed that the speech received more attention in Saigon, where it had the unintended consequence of "causing the Diem regime to increase its harassment of the American press corps in Vietnam, whom they blamed for 'misleading' Mansfield" (*Mansfield and Vietnam*, 101).
166. Seth Jacobs, *Cold War Mandarin: Ngo Dinh Diem and the Origins of America's War in Vietnam, 1959–1963* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 137.
167. Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, 179.
168. Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 113.
169. Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, 179.
170. Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 113.
171. "The President's News Conference of March 6, 1963," *Public Papers, 1963*, 243.
172. "Address at Miami Beach at a Fundraising Dinner in Honor of Senator Smathers, March 10, 1962," *Public Papers, 1962*, 210.
173. "Remarks at the High School Football Stadium, Los Alamos, New Mexico, December 7, 1962," *Public Papers, 1962*, 856.
174. "Remarks at West Point to the Graduating Class of the U.S. Military Academy, June 6, 1962," *Public Papers, 1962*, 453.
175. "Television and Radio Interview: 'After Two Years—A Conversation with the President,' December 17, 1962," *Public Papers, 1962*, 902–903.
176. "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union, January 14, 1963," *Public Papers, 1963*, 11.
177. "Annual Budget Message to the Congress, Fiscal Year 1964, January 17, 1963," *Public Papers, 1963*, 34.
178. "Special Message to the Congress on Free World Defense and Assistance Programs, April 2, 1963," *Public Papers, 1963*, 303, 295.
179. "Remarks at a Reception Honoring Medal of Honor Recipients, May 2, 1963," *Public Papers, 1963*, 363.
180. Schwab, *Defending the Free World*, 37.
181. Schwab, *Defending the Free World*, 37–38.
182. Moya Ann Ball, "A Case Study of the Kennedy Administration's Decision-Making Concerning the Diem Coup of November, 1963," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 54 (1990): 568.
183. Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, 179.
184. Schwab, *Defending the Free World*, 38.
185. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part II, 143.
186. "Saigon Incident," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 12, 1963, 2.
187. Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 26.
188. Hammer, *A Death in November*, 145.
189. Rust, *Kennedy in Vietnam*, 97. The Buddhist crisis had an impact on JFK. Journalist Malcolm Browne reported that Henry Cabot Lodge told him that Kennedy kept an immolation picture on his desk and the president told his new ambassador to South Vietnam, "We're going to have to do something about that regime." Soon after, the administration reduced aid to Diem's government. See Malcolm W. Browne, *Muddy Boots and Red Socks: A Reporters Life* (New York: Times Books, 1993), 12.
190. Schwab, *Defending the Free World*, 59.
191. Jacobs, *Cold War Mandarin*, 147.
192. Karnow, *Vietnam* (1983), 280.
193. Lisa M. Skow and George N. Dionisopoulos, "A Struggle to Contextualize Photographic Images: American Print Media and the 'Burning Monk,'" *Communication Quarterly* 45 (1997): 393, 394.
194. Jacobs, *Cold War Mandarin*, 148.
195. "Vietnam Crisis in Religious," *Christian Century*, September 11, 1963, 1093; and "Saigon Concedes Two Buddhist Points," *New York Times*, June 15, 1963, 1.
196. Schwab, *Defending the Free World*, 58.
197. Rust, *Kennedy in Vietnam*, 102.
198. "The President's News Conference of July 17, 1963," *Public Papers, 1963*, 569.

199. "Transcript of Broadcast with Walter Cronkite Inaugurating a CBS Television News Program, September 2, 1963," *Public Papers, 1963*, 652.
200. "Transcript of Broadcast on NBC's 'Huntley-Brinkley Report,' September 9, 1963," *Public Papers, 1963*, 659.
201. Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 27.
202. Rust, *Kennedy in Vietnam*, 103.
203. Rust, *Kennedy in Vietnam*, 107.
204. Karnow, *Vietnam* (1983), 282.
205. Rust, *Kennedy in Vietnam*, 104.
206. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part II, 148.
207. Rust, *Kennedy in Vietnam*, 104.
208. Karnow, *Vietnam* (1983), 285.
209. Rust, *Kennedy in Vietnam*, 105–106.
210. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part II, 148; Rust, *Kennedy in Vietnam*, 107.
211. Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 27.
212. Jacobs, *Cold War Mandarin*, 160.
213. Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 27.
214. Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 27.
215. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part II, 156.
216. Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 27. At a news conference in September the president was asked if—given "the prevailing confusion"—he could "state today just what this Government's policy is toward the current government of South Viet-Nam?" He said the United States was "for those things and those policies which help win the war. . . . What helps us to win the war, we support; what interferes with the war effort we oppose." "The President's News Conference of September 13, 1963," *Public Papers, 1963*, 673.
217. Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 294.
218. Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 295.
219. Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 27.
220. Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 296.
221. Schwab, *Defending the Free World*, 62.
222. Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 296–297.
223. "The President's News Conference of November 14, 1963," *Public Papers, 1963*, 846; and Ball, "A Case Study," 568.
224. Hammer, *A Death in November*, 310.
225. "Opportunity in Vietnam," *New York Times*, November 3, 1963, E8.
226. Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 299.
227. "Engagement in Saigon," *New Republic*, March 12, 1962, 1.
228. Schwab, *Defending the Free World*, 38.
229. As quoted in Herring, *America's Longest War*, 131.
230. As quoted in "Excerpts from McNamara's Report to Johnson, December 21, 1963," in Moss, *A Vietnam Reader*, 68; and Bill Moyers, "Flashbacks," *Newsweek*, February 10, 1975, 76. See also Karnow, *Vietnam* (1991), 338–339.
231. Lloyd C. Gardner, *Pay Any Price: Lyndon Johnson and the Wars for Vietnam* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1995), 89–93; Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 303–305; Moss, *Vietnam*, 146–149; Schulzinger, *A Time for War*, 132; and Herring, *America's Longest War*, 136, 138.
232. As quoted in Mansfield, "Viet Nameese Situation" [memo to the President], January 6, 1964, 1, MP, XXII, 103, #13.
233. "Transcript of Television and Radio Interview Conducted by Representatives of Major Broadcast Services, March 15, 1964," *Public Papers, 1964*, 370.
234. As quoted in Robert S. McNamara with Brian VanDeMark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Times Books, 1995), 106–107. See also Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 304, 309; Moss, *Vietnam*, 148–149; Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 126–129; and Kahin, *Intervention*, 165.
235. As quoted in Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part II, 219–222. See also *Congressional Record*, February 19, 1964, 3114–3115; and Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 129–131.
236. As quoted in Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 309–311; Moss, *Vietnam*, 149–156; and George Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern* (New York: Norton, 1982), 377. See also Schulzinger, *A Time for War*, 134–136, 140; and Herring, *America's Longest War*, 134.
237. As quoted in Moss, *Vietnam*, 149. See also Herring, *America's Longest War*, 138–141; and Schulzinger, *A Time for War*, 136–145.

238. As quoted in Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 133–134. See also Richard A. Cherwitz, “Masking Inconsistency: The Tonkin Gulf Crisis,” *Communication Quarterly* 28 (1980): 36.
239. As quoted in Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part II, 280–301. See also Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 141–144; and Moss, *Vietnam*, 156–160.
240. As quoted in Lyndon B. Johnson, “Radio and Television Report to the American People Following Renewed Aggression in the Gulf of Tonkin,” August 4, 1964, American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26419>. Cherwitz claims that LBJ used this report, the message he sent to Congress the following day, and a speech he delivered at Syracuse University on the evening of August 5 “to create a crisis” persuading Congress to intervene in Vietnam and the American public to support that intervention. See “Lyndon Johnson and the ‘Crisis’ of Tonkin Gulf: A President’s Justification of War,” *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 42 (1978): 93–104.
241. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part II, 301–320; and Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 134–136.
242. *Congressional Record*, August 5, 1964, 18133–18139.
243. As quoted in Ball, *Past Has Another Pattern*, 380; and George Reedy, interview with Gregory Olson, Milwaukee, September 15, 1987. See also Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part II, 320–342; Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 144–146; Moss, *Vietnam*, 160–162; and Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 136.
244. As quoted in George McGovern, *Grassroots: The Autobiography of George McGovern* (New York: Random House, 1977), 103–104; and Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part II, 330–333.
245. Cherwitz argues that LBJ’s private expressions on Vietnam were similar to Goldwater’s public ones “with the exception of [Goldwater’s] desire to use atomic weapons,” LBJ “needed an opportunity that would allow him to implement previously formulated plans with minimal opposition, . . . he needed a way of reconciling inconsistencies in his public and private discourse”; North Vietnam’s attack in the Gulf of Tonkin provided that. See “Masking Inconsistency,” 34, 36.
246. As quoted in Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part II, 357–359, 363–364. See also Moss, *Vietnam*, 162–165; and Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 146–147.
247. As quoted in Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part II, 343–356, 359–383; and Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern*, 376, 382–385. See also Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 147–151.
248. As quoted in Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 151–155. See also William Conrad Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships*, Part III, 1965–1966 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 60–61; Kahin, *Intervention*, 276–277; and Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 142.
249. As quoted in Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part III, 61–83, 78, 92–96; NSF, Meeting Notes File, “2/6/65 7:45 p.m. NSC Meeting,” Box 1, 2–3, LBJ Library; and Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives on the Presidency, 1963–1969* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 125. See also Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern*, 389–390; and Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 142–146.
250. Research on groups suggests that “deviates exerted little influence” and that “sometimes it is very hard for an opinion deviate to influence a group.” See Gloria Galanes, Katherine Adams, and John K. Brillhart, *Effective Group Discussion: Theory and Practice*, 11th ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2004), 365–366, G-3.
251. As quoted in Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 8, 322–339, 411–413, 485–486; Leroy Ashby and Rod Gramer, *Fighting the Odds: The Life of Senator Frank Church* (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1994), 192; and Frank Valeo, Oral History Interview #2, Senate Historical Office, Washington, DC, 1985, 63. See also Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part II, 277.
252. As quoted in Ashby and Gramer, 182–183. See also Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 339; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part II, 277; and *Congressional Record*, June 23, 1964, 14788–14793.
253. As quoted in Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 7, 10–11, 339, 731, 408–415; and *Congressional Record*, February 17, 1965, 2869–2881. See also Ashby and Gramer, 192; Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 126–133; and Frank Church, “We Are in Too Deep in Asia and Africa,” *New York Times Magazine*, February 14, 1965, 30–31, 84, 86.
254. As quoted in Ashby and Gramer, 193–197; and Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 8–18, 409–413. See also Bill Christofferson, *The Man from Clear Lake: Earth Day Founder, Senator Gaylord Nelson* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 287–289; Ezra Siff, *Why the Senate Slept: The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and the Beginning of America’s Vietnam War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), 64–70; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part III, 128–129; and George McGovern, interview with Paige Mulhollan, April 30, 1969, LBJ Oral History Project, LBJ Library, 4–8.
255. As quoted in Karnow, *Vietnam* (1991), 431–432. See also Clifford with Holbrooke, *Counsel to the President*, 406; Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 155–157; Moss, *Vietnam*, 174; and Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 146–147.

256. As quoted in Gardner, *Pay Any Price*, 177–179. See also Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part III, 138–139.
257. As quoted in Ball, *Past Has Another Pattern*, 336. See also Gardner, *Pay Any Price*, 179; Herring, *America's Longest War*, 159; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part III, 267–274; and Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 428–429.
258. As quoted in Kahin, *Intervention*, 324–325.
259. "Statement by the President on Viet-Nam, March 25, 1965," *Public Papers, 1965*, 319.
260. As quoted in "President Johnson Speaks to the Nation about South Viet Nam, From Johns-Hopkins Univ.," April 7, 1965, LBJ Library Audio Collection, WHCA #283, LBJ Library; Olson, *Landmark Speeches*, 45, 47–49, 51; and Gardner, *Pay Any Price*, 184–200. See also Kathleen J. Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War: Vietnam and the Press* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 119–127; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part III, 217; Kahin, *Intervention*, 325–327; and Karnow, *Vietnam* (1991), 434.
261. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part III, 217–221; McNamara with VanDeMark, *In Retrospect*, 181–182; Gardner, *Pay Any Price*, 197; Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War*, 115–133; Siff, *Why the Senate Slept*, 83–91; Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 149–151; and McGovern, interview LBJ Oral History Project, 8–11.
262. As quoted in Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 149–150; and Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 426. See also William C. Berman, *William Fulbright and the Vietnam War: The Dissent of a Political Realist* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1988), 37–38; and Gardner, *Pay Any Price*, 195–199.
263. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part III, 221–225; James Miller, *"Democracy in the Streets": From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1987), 232; Robert Pardun, *Prairie Radical: A Journey through the Sixties* (Los Gatos, CA: Shire Press, 2001), 104–105, 345 n. 61; and Helen Garvy, *Rebels with a Cause*, documentary, Shire Films, 2000.
264. Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 5, 15–17, 651–657; Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1987), 3, 110–111, 186; and Garvy, *Rebels with a Cause*, documentary.
265. As quoted in Helen Garvy, *Rebels with a Cause: A Collective Memoir of the Hopes, Rebellions and Repression of the 1960s* (Los Gatos, CA: Shire Press, 2007), 49; Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 102, 184; Sale, *SDS*, 189; and Miller, *Democracy in the Streets*, 233. See also Nancy Zaroulis and Gerald Sullivan, *Who Spoke Up? American Protest against the War in Vietnam, 1963–1975* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 41.
266. State Historical Society of Wisconsin Archives, Madison, Students for a Democratic Society, UC517A, March on Washington, Tape 15, parts 2 and 3, 5/18/1965 (note that the wrong date is given for the event); and Olson, *Landmark Speeches*, 55–57.
267. Sale, *SDS*, 189–192; and State Historical Society of Wisconsin, SDS, Tape 15, parts 2 and 3. See also Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part III, 223.
268. As quoted in Garvy, *Rebels with a Cause: A Collective Memoir*, 51–52; Lyndon B. Johnson, "Statement by the President: 'Tragedy, Disappointment, and Progress' in Viet-Nam," April 17, 1965, American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26901>; and Claudia T. Johnson, *Lady Bird Johnson, A White House Diary* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970), qtd. in Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part III, 221–225.
269. As quoted in Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 183–186. See also Garvy, *Rebels with a Cause: A Collective Memoir*, 52–61; Miller, *"Democracy in the Streets"*, 233; Sale, *SDS*, 191–193; Pardun, *Prairie Radical*, 139; Zaroulis and Sullivan, *Who Spoke Up?*, 41; Helen Garvy, email to Gregory Olson, December 15, 2008; and Carl Oglesby, "Let Us Shape the Future," November 27, 1965, *Rebels with a Cause*.
270. As quoted in Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 429–431. See also Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part III, 225–237; and Moss, *Vietnam*, 179–180.
271. As quoted in Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 431–433; and Lyndon B. Johnson, "Remarks to Committee Members on the Need for Additional Appropriations for Military Purposes in Viet-Nam and the Dominican Republic," May 4, 1965, American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26938>. See also Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part III, 237–243; Herring, *America's Longest War*, 161; and Moss, *Vietnam*, 180.
272. As quoted in Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 433–437; and Lyndon B. Johnson, "Remarks upon Signing Resolution Appropriating Funds for Military Requirements in Viet-Nam," May 7, 1965, American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26946>. See also Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part III, 243–252.
273. As quoted in Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part III, 242, 252–257. See also Johnson, *The Vantage Point*, 136–137; and Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 438–439.

274. As quoted in Gardner, *Pay Any Price*, 224–225. See also Moss, *Vietnam*, 180–181; McNamara with VanDeMark, *In Retrospect*, 186–187; and Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 439–440.
275. As quoted in McNamara with VanDeMark, *In Retrospect*, 186–187; and Mansfield, “Viet Nam,” June 9, 1965, 1, MP, XXII, Box 102, #13. See also Moss, *Vietnam*, 180–181; and Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 439–440.
276. As quoted in McNamara with VanDeMark, *In Retrospect*, 187–188; and Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 163.
277. As quoted in Kahin, *Intervention*, 349; John Burke and Fred Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1989), 257; and Harry McPherson, Interview with T. H. Baker, March 24, 1969, 19–20, LBJ Oral History Project, LBJ Library.
278. Confidential Memo of Mansfield, June 3, 1965; Mansfield, Memorandum to the President, “Viet Nam,” June 5, 1965, 1–4, Mansfield, “Viet Nam,” June 9, 1965, 1, MP, XXII, Box 102, #13.
279. As quoted in Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part III, 288.
280. Berman, *William Fulbright*, 16–18. See also Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part II, 222–223; Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 149–150; and Lester Thonssen, ed., *Representative American Speeches: 1963–1964* (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1964), 91–114.
281. As quoted in J. William Fulbright with Seth Tillman, *The Price of Empire* (New York: Pantheon, 1989), 107–109; and Carl Marcy, Oral History Interview, Senate Historical Office, Washington, DC, 1983, 139–140. See also Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 149.
282. As quoted in Fulbright with Tillman, *The Price of Empire*, 109. See also Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 149–150.
283. As quoted in Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 432–433.
284. As quoted in Pat Holt, Oral History Interview, Senate Historical Office, Washington, DC, 1980, 167, 177, 199; Marcy, Oral History Interview, 163–164; *Congressional Record*, June 15, 1965, 13656–13657; Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 444–446; George F. Will, “MacArthur’s Two Words,” *Newsweek*, January 15, 2007, 72; and Jonathan Alter, “Trials of the Truth Seekers,” *Newsweek*, May 7, 2007, 37. See also Hemhill Hosford and Mrs. L.A. Allen, Letters to Fulbright, June 21 and 16, 1965, Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part III, 303–304; William Conrad Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships*, Part IV, July 1965–January 1968 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 222–230; Randall Bennett Woods, *Fulbright: A Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 402–414; and Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 151.
285. J. William Fulbright, *The Arrogance of Power* (New York: Random House, 1966), 58.
286. As quoted in Karnow, *Vietnam* (1991), 420; and Mansfield, Letter to Gregory Olson, August 18, 1987.
287. As quoted in Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part III, 350–351; and Telephone Call between Ball and the President, June 14, 1965, Papers of G. Ball, Box 7, LBJ Library. See also Mansfield, Letter to the President, June 22, 1965/Mansfield, “Suggestions on the Vietnamese Situation,” June 14, 1965, MP, XXII, 102, #13; and McGeorge Bundy, Memo to Mansfield, June 29, 1965, NSF Subject File: Vietnam Mansfield, LBJ Library; Lyndon Johnson, Letter to Mansfield, n.d., NSF Name File, Box 6, LBJ Library.
288. As quoted in Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 447–448; and Moya Ann Ball, *Vietnam-on-the-Potomac* (New York: Praeger, 1992), 166. See also Gardner, *Pay Any Price*, 229–230; Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 163; Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern*, 398–399; and Moss, *Vietnam*, 181.
289. As quoted in Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part III, 347–350; and Gardner, *Pay Any Price*, 240–241. LBJ met with the “Wise Men” again in November 1967 and March 1968. The group changed over time and by 1968 included Ball, McGeorge Bundy, and Lodge. In the 1967 meeting, the Wise Men were almost unanimous that the United States must stay the course. By March 1968, after the Communist Tet Offensive, the group was not unanimous, but believed that disengagement was the best option. Ball claims that this conclusion “profoundly shook the President.” The next day, LBJ met with Mansfield, who reinforced the opinion of the Wise Men; Mann thinks it unclear if Mansfield’s meeting was “decisive” or part of the “cumulative” effort of those seeking a wind-down of the war. But in 1968, the opinions of the Wise Men, Mansfield, Clifford, McPherson, United Nations ambassador Arthur Goldberg, and others helped to push Johnson to his decision to withdraw from the 1968 presidential race and concentrate on negotiating an end to the conflict. Nixon wrote that Tet and Johnson’s decision to seek a negotiated end to the war constrained him: “It was no longer a question of whether the next president would withdraw our troops but of how they would leave and what they would leave behind.” As quoted in Ball, *Past Has Another Pattern*, 407–409;

- Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 596–600; and Richard Nixon, *No More Vietnams* (New York: Arbor House, 1985), 96. See also Olson, *Mansfield and Vietnam*, 192–193.
290. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part III, 359–365, 369–388; and Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 448.
291. As quoted in Ball, *Past Has Another Pattern*, 402–403; and *Congressional Record*, July 21, 1965, 17797–17799. See also Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part III, 390.
292. As quoted in Meeting on Vietnam, July 21, 1965, LBJ Library; Kahin, *Intervention*, 366–378; and Gardner, *Pay Any Price*, 245. See also Clifford with Holbrooke, *Counsel to the President*, 411–413; Ball, *Past Has Another Pattern*, 399–402; and Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part III, ix–x.
293. As quoted in Meeting on Vietnam, July 22, 1965, 12:00 P.M./Meeting on Vietnam, July 22, 1965, 3:00 P.M., LBJ Library; Clifford with Holbrooke, *Counsel to the President*, 413–415; and Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part III, 412. See also Kahin, *Intervention*, 378–387.
294. As quoted in Schulzinger, *A Time for War*, xi, 178. See also Mansfield, Memo to the President, July 23, 1965, 1–3, MP, XXII, 102, #13; Ball, Memo to Lyndon Johnson, July 24, 1965, NSF Name File, Box 6, LBJ Library; and Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 252–253, 452–453.
295. As quoted in Meetings on Vietnam, July 25, 1965, LBJ Library; and Clifford with Holbrooke, *Counsel to the President*, 418–421. See also Kahin, *Intervention*, 388–390.
296. As quoted in Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part III, 435; and Kahin, *Intervention*, 391, 529 n. 20.
297. As quoted in Mansfield et al., Memo to the President, “Meeting on Viet Nam,” July 27, 1965, 1–3, MP, XXII, 102, #13; and Lyndon Johnson, Letter to Mansfield, July 28, 1965/Robert McNamara, memo for the President, July 28, 1965, 1–6, MP, XXII, 102, #13. See also Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 461–462.
298. *Congressional Record*, July 27, 1965, 18309, 18316–18318; and Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 462–463.
299. NSF, Meeting Notes, “7/21–27/65 Meetings on Vietnam,” Box 1 and “7/27/65 NSC Meeting: Joint Leadership Meeting,” Box 1, LBJ Library. See also Mansfield, “Notes on Viet Nam,” July 26, 1965, MP, XXII, 102, #13; and Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part III, 424–427.
300. As quoted in NSF, Meeting Notes, “7/21–27/65 Meetings on Vietnam,” Box 1 and “7/27/65 NSC Meeting: Joint Leadership Meeting,” Box 1, LBJ Library; Mansfield, “Notes on Viet Nam,” July 26, 1965, MP, XXII, 102, #13; Mansfield, Letter to Gregory Olson, April 25, 1990; Johnson, *The Vantage Point*, 151; and Gardner, *Pay Any Price*, 250. See also Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 455–458; Kahin, *Intervention*, 391–397; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government*, Part III, 427–431; and Jack Valenti, *A Very Human President* (New York: Norton, 1975), 354–356.
301. As quoted in Valenti, *A Very Human President*, 354–356.
302. As quoted in “The President’s News Conference of July 28, 1965,” *Public Papers, 1965*, 794–803; and Moss, *Vietnam*, 182. See also Gardner, *Pay Any Price*, 251–252.
303. As quoted in Mann, *A Grand Delusion*, 458. See also Ball, *Past Has Another Pattern*, 403.
304. Norman A. Graebner, “Myth and Reality: America’s Rhetorical Cold War,” in *Critical Reflections on the Cold War: Linking Rhetoric and History*, ed. Martin J. Medhurst and H. W. Brands (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000), 21, 23. See also Robert J. McMahon, “By Helping Others We Help Ourselves: The Cold War Rhetoric of American Foreign Policy,” in Medhurst and Brands, 236, 237.
305. Shawn J. Perry-Giles, “Militarizing America’s Propaganda Program, 1945–55,” in Medhurst and Brands, *Critical Reflections*, 112, 122. See also Ned O’Gorman, “Eisenhower and the American Sublime,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 94 (2008): 44–72.
306. Goldzwig and Dionisopoulos, *In a Perilous Hour*, 146. See also Bostdorff and Goldzwig, “Idealism and Pragmatism,” 515–530.
307. John M. Murphy, “Crafting the Kennedy Legacy,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 3.4 (2000): 581.
308. After the US withdrawal from Vietnam in 1975, the immediate post-Vietnam War political environment led to what many have labeled the “Vietnam Syndrome”—a condition that purportedly left US presidents, the Congress, and the American people reticent to engage in bloody land wars in faraway nations. For a discussion of the attempt to overcome the Vietnam Syndrome, see, for example, George N. Dionisopoulos and Steven R. Goldzwig, “The Meaning of Vietnam’: Political Rhetoric as Revisionist Cultural History,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 78.1 (1992): 61–79.

