JOHN F. KENNEDY'S FOREIGN POLICY: A STUDY OF ITS FORMATION IN 1961

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by

DONALD DUDLEY MORGAN

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Major Professor

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The 1960's was one of the most eventful periods in the history of the United States. The decade witnessed such events as the assassination of three prominent national figures, Americans walking on the moon, violent riots in the nation's cities and on college campuses from coast to coast, and the deaths of thousands of Americans in the swamps and the jungles of South Vietnam. During the period the Cold War tempered the nation's foreign policies. America's primary adversary, the Communist World, suffered a rift that ended its stereotyped monolithic appearance. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization /NATO/ was weakened by the withdrawal of Gaullist France, and the Third World emerged from its colonial status. Despite the split in Communist ranks and the spread of revolution against colonialism around the globe, the United States attempted to maintain the status quo of the 1950's.

The direction of America's foreign policy was determined in November, 1960. The election of the 43 year old John F. Kennedy, the youngest man ever chosen President of the United States, ended the eight year control of the White House by the Republicans. Compared to his predecessor, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Kennedy was exciting, invigorating, and energetic. His style was fresh and seemed typical of modern twentieth century man. He was a liberal and something of an intellectual.

Kennedy gained his victory in the 1960 election at the expense of

Richard M. Nixon. A conservative Republican, Nixon had come to prominence in the late 1940's as a member of the House Committee on UnAmerican Activities. He had ridden the crest of McCarthyism and won the second spot on the Republican ticket in 1952. As Vice President in 1960, Nixon's candidacy constituted, in part, a referendum on the Eisenhower years. Many voters cast their ballots for Kennedy simply because they feared Nixon's election would mean the continuation of Eisenhower's conservatism.[1] Although Kennedy promised an Administration that would relieve much of the tension of the Cold War, his foreign policy turned out to be an extension of that established by Harry S. Truman in the 1940's and perpetuated by Eisenhower in the 1950's. Like their policies, Kennedy's centered around the containment of Communism within existing boundaries. Kennedy employed a different style, but the policies he adopted varied little from those of Truman and Eisenhower. The methods he employed differed, but the basic objectives remained constant. To Kennedy the way to achieve these goals was to formulate a foreign policy based on an image of unwavering strength. The basic assumption for America's foreign policy since the end of World War II has been to maintain the balance of power between American and Soviet influence around the world.[2] This premise affected relations with the Communist governments of the world. The policy of containment, first applied against the Soviet Union in Europe, was expanded around the globe to restrict the Chinese Communists /CHICOM/ and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam /DRV/ in Southeast Asia.

Theodore C. Sorensen and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., two of Kennedy's most ardent admirers, have credited him with the ability to learn from his mistakes. John Kennedy possessed a remarkable ability

to adjust to new situations. Contrary to the claims of Sorensen and Schlesinger, however, this did not always mean that he profited from experience. He was often unable to comprehend the advice he received.

When Kennedy became President the American people believed he would reawaken the nation from the conservative influence of Eisenhower. In an effort to "get America moving" he gathered a group of advisers around him who have been described as "the best and the brightest" the nation had to offer.[3] Among the appointees who played significant roles in the determination of the foreign policies in 1961 were three Cabinet members: Dean Rusk, Robert McNamara, and Robert Kennedy. Also of major importance were General Maxwell Taylor and White House aides McGeorge Bundy, Walt Rostow, and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. A number of undersecretaries and area advisers performed significant duties for specific periods and projects. The one representative of the legislative branch who played an important role was the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, J. William Fulbright. These men established the tone and controlled the formulation of United States foreign policy for the next seven years. Instead of implementing new policies, they continued the concepts of earlier administrations and maintained the policy of containment.

Kennedy believed that foreign affairs should be the major concern of the President and that domestic problems could be handled by lower ranking members of his team. Congressional and public opinion did restrain foreign policy actions. But Kennedy reasoned that he could not afford to gain support for foreign affairs initiatives at cost of domestic support. To him, a show of weakness in either area reflected upon the other and on the Administration's credibility. He never allowed the pressures

arising from internal problems to overshadow external considerations.

Central to Kennedy's conception of foreign policy was the idea that the competition between the United States and the Soviet Union was becoming a struggle for influence in the Third World. He thought America was in danger of lagging in that rivalry and gave priority to filling the gaps in policy toward emerging nations and then preventing new ones from developing. Kennedy expressed his position in his Inaugural Address:

> To those new states whom we welcome to the ranks of the free, we pledge our word that one form of colonial control shall not have passed away merely to be replaced by a far more iron tyranny. We shall not always expect to find them supporting our view. But we shall always hope to find them strongly supporting their own freedom.[4]

Kennedy desired a nonviolent struggle for the Third World. To him, this meant the maintenance of Third World-United States relations. He stated in the Senate on June 14, 1960 that the nation's task was to

> rebuild our strength, and the strength of the free world--to prove to the Soviets that time and the course of history are not on their side, that the balance of power is not shifting their way--and that therefore peaceful settlement is essential to mutual survival.[5]

Kennedy believed the Soviets would have to sacrifice their desires for added influence in the Third World in deference to American interests.

Kennedy felt a genuine sympathy for the peoples of the developing areas. But, as Richard Walton wrote, to him "progress and self-determination was limited to regimes found acceptable by Washington--almost always not on the basis of service to their own people but on the basis of their anti-Communism."[6] Kennedy believed that the Cold War would turn in favor of the nation able and willing to buy the most support with money and arms. What he failed to realize was that this policy ignored the

real hopes of the people for economic and social development.

During his Inaugural Address, Kennedy expressed what appeared to be a sincere desire to create world peace. Speaking "to those nations who would make themselves our adversary," he offered,

> not a pledge but a request; that both sides begin anew the quest for peace, before the dark powers of destruction unleashed by science engulf all humanity in planned or accidental self-destruction.[8]

This statement was obviously directed toward the Soviet Union and was reiterated at Vienna when Kennedy and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev agreed to support efforts to seek a peaceful solution to the struggle being waged in Laos. Kennedy's statement revealed a second concept that he repeated to Khrushchev during their meeting and in sessions with other Soviet officials. This was his belief that a miscalculation by either of the two great powers could result in a devastating general war. Kennedy was not convinced that such a disaster could be avoided. He often warned of a period of dire crisis in the near future. In his State of the Union Address on January 30, 1961, the new President told the Congress

> No man entering upon this office . . . could fail to be staggered upon learning . . . the harsh enormity of the trials through which we must pass in the next four years. Each day the crises multiply. Each day their solution grows more difficult. Each day we draw nearer the hour of maximum danger, as weapons spread and hostile forces grow stronger.[9]

These factors were important to the forming of Kennedy's foreign policies during 1961. Another element appeared to be even more vital to Kennedy and his advisers and often clouded their appraisals of a problem. Above all else, Kennedy feared that he would appear weak and irresolute. He selected policies that would present an image of firmness

and determination in crisis situations.

These concepts shaped Kennedy's foreign policies in 1961. They helped to account for the abortive Bay of Pigs invasion, Kennedy's meeting with Khrushchev, and the Laotian crisis of early 1961. Finally, the development of the country's policy toward South Vietnam demonstrates how Kennedy's approach to problems became military rather than political. It was in Vietnam that Kennedy decided to stand against Communism and committed the United States to what would become a highly controversial course of action. To appreciate the importance of Kennedy's approach to world problems and his concern for the nation's image in his policies, one may recall Major General C. V. Clifton's description of the Presidency:

> The awesome power of the President is most fully revealed in his role as Commander in Chief. He alone can mobilize the nation, determine priorities, expend or preserve the national resources, deploy military forces to danger points, and, finally, commit them to battle. His is the only finger on the nuclear trigger.[10]

The following pages, by focusing on the four situations mentioned above, will explore the formation of Kennedy's foreign policy in 1961. The importance of his concept of image and his development as President throughout the year will be discussed. By failing to learn the valuable lessons he was exposed to, Kennedy led the nation from the fiasco on the beaches of Cuba to the increasingly critical quagmire of South Vietnam.

CHAPTER II

VENTURE IN CUBA

Theodore Sorensen listed fifteen separate crises which John Kennedy faced during his first eight months as President. Of these, the one he labeled as "the incident that showed John Kennedy that his luck and his judgement had human limitations, and the experience that taught him invaluable lessons for the future" was the Bay of Pigs fiasco.[1] The attempted invasion of Cuba between April 17 and 19, 1961 had been planned for more than a year. However, due to alterations made in the plans during the slightly more than two and one-half months preceding the venture, what appeared to be an operation fated to succeed became one that was doomed, from the outset to failure.

The ultimate goal of the Bay of Pigs operation was the overthrow and removal of Fidel Castro's regime in Cuba. This, the Eisenhower and the Kennedy Administrations felt, would rid the Western Hemisphere of a direct Communist threat. The effort to overthrow the Castro government reflected Kennedy's views of the world and the position of the United States in it. The Eisenhower Administration began the process of transferring the containment of Communism within existing borders to the Caribbean. It was not until the election campaign of 1960, however, that Kennedy actually proposed containment as a viable foreign policy for application to Cuba.

The Bay of Pigs revealed Kennedy's concepts of the balance of power

THIS BOOK CONTAINS NUMEROUS PAGES WITH MULTIPLE PENCIL AND/OR PEN MARKS THROUGHOUT THE TEXT.

THIS IS THE BEST IMAGE AVAILABLE.

and his fear of appearing weak in the face of Communism. But the incident suggests many questions. Why was the operation permitted to fail? Why did Kennedy even allow it to occur? Did the President actually learn the lessons his admirers claim he did? If so, what were these lessons and did he remember them later when making major foreign policy decisions? How did the Bay of Pigs reflect Kennedy's views? Finally, why did he consent to the operation when he was not willing to commit the forces required to guarantee its ultimate success?

Planning -- The Early Stages

Planning for the Cuban invasion began on March 17, 1960, when President Eisenhower authorized the Central Intelligence Agency [CIA] to organize, train, and equip a guerilla force of Cuban exiles capable of infiltrating Cuba and overthrowing the Castro regime.[2] The planners of the operation understood from the beginning that they were to allow for the influences of time and politics. Their guideline was to be able to guarantee success. Eisenhower's advisers felt that a defeat would serve only to fortify Castro's position while damaging the world-wide posture of the United States.

This attitude of planning only for victory created a false impression among the anti-Castro forces. The morale of the Cuban Freedom Fighters [CFF] was high, and the confidence of their American instructors was firm. These feelings were based on the conviction that Eisenhower's approval of the project meant that he would not allow it to fail even if overt United States involvement became necessary. Although this assumption proved wrong after Kennedy assumed office, it was not entirely inaccurate during the early months of planning. Mario Lazo reported that

"Eisenhower has said that his country's prestige and power should never be committed unless its Chief Executive was determined to win" [emphasis in original].[3]

Richard Bissell assumed the specific responsibility for the organization and the planning of the expedition at the CIA. Bissell held impressive credentials for the task. He had been a participant in the agency's successful satellite reconnaissance program and had aided in the development of the U-2 independent Air Squadron which he at one time commanded.

The CIA established training sites in Central America and in the United States. The original concept called for the gradual infiltration of the estimated 400 to 600 CFF back into Cuba where they could reinforce the thousands of guerillas already fighting against Castro. American trained Cuban pilots were already attempting to deliver supplies to these forces in the Escambray Mountains.[4]

By the autumn of 1960 the CIA had started to envision a more ambitious and risky operation. Castro had begun forming large-scale militia units to crush the counterrevolutionaries. The CIA planners proposed an invasion to save the anti-Castro movement. The purpose of this force was to establish a beachhead in Cuba where a provisional government could be set up and serve as a rallying point for those dissatisfied with Castro's rule.[5] A group of Cuban political leaders would fly to the area for this purpose. After setting up a provisional government, they would call for recognition and request military assistance. Eisenhower's advisers expected most of the Caribbean states to respond promptly and favorably to the call. The CIA believed that an insurrection might occur if a beachhead were successfully established, Castro's

forces were beaten when they counterattacked, and the invaders could control the air thus permitting them to supply outlying regions. They expected, at the least, that there would be large-scale desertion from Castro's forces. Finally, they felt that after a few days and the recognition of the provisional government by Latin American capitals and by Washington, Castro would be prepared to negotiate for a cease-fire. This would be granted on the condition that he would soon permit free elections.[6]

By November, the CIA was considering a number of tentative plans for the invasion. It was significant that at that time the Joint Chiefs of Staff [JCS] was unaware of the extent of the scheming and, in fact, did not review it until the following January. In September, 1965, Eisenhower stated that Kennedy could not have felt irreversibly committed to the project when he took office. As of January 20, 1961, no final tactical or operational plans had been discussed, no such plans had even been submitted for consideration, and no one in his Administration had made any mandate insuring its completion.[7] Yet, due to statements Kennedy had made regarding the nations's policies toward Castro, the new Administration was committed to action. The plans presented to him provided the opportunity he desired to attempt to crush the Castro government.

Throughout the summer and autumn of 1960, Eisenhower periodically reviewed the CIA's schemes. In November he made his final review of the project. No definite plan nor timetable resulted. The project had been under the close observation of Under Secretary of Defense James Douglas who had filled many of the CIA's request for equipment and supplies. Douglas agreed with the JCS that little good would result

from an attack by Cubans alone. Feeling that the force as proposed was too small for the task prescribed, he counseled for the inclusion of provisions for a United States naval escort and air cover. Eisenhower understood this, and no evidence appeared to indicate that he disapproved.[8]

Late in 1960, what little responsibility the JCS had for the project became the concern of the colonels serving on the Joint Staff. While the White House cautioned Bissell that he might have to revert to the original objective of reinforcing the guerillas by infiltration, he was encouraged by his CIA superiors to continue preparations for an all-out invasion. Intelligence reports established that Castro was to begin receiving Soviet jets in early 1961 and that Cuban pilots were already being trained to fly them in Czechoslovakia. This would provide him with the most powerful air force in Latin America. He was also making progress in efforts to stop the guerilla activity in the mountains. Added to this was increased instability within the political sections of the exile movement. The Cubans were becoming impatient for their American benefactors to set a date for the action to commence. The feeling among the CFF and their American instructors was that the operation had to be launched the following spring or it would never have a chance of succeeding.[9]

Cuba as a Campaign Issue

The question of United States-Cuban relations became a national political issue during the 1960 presidential campaign. Much of Kennedy's campaign was based on his opinion that Eisenhower had permitted America's prestige around the world to sag. The consequence of this, he maintained, was the ascendancy of Soviet influence where Washington had previously

been the predominant power. He particularly emphasized this point when speaking of the American posture in Cuba.

Kennedy often spoke of the decline of the influence of the American Ambassador in Havana. On August 24 he told a Democratic Rally in Alexandria, Virginia that "three years ago I went to Havana. I was told that the American Ambassador was the second most powerful man in Cuba . . . . he is not today."[10] On September 2 during a speech in Portland, Maine, he added that the Ambassador today "cannot even get to see the Foreign Minister's assistant."[11] On the fifth he remarked in Pontiac, Michigan that the American Ambassador had been replaced in his position of influence by the Soviet representative.[12] In all, he made nine separate references to this change of posture between August 24 and October 23. Kennedy emphasized this during the campaign because he believed that the United States had failed to exert properly its influence to persuade the Cuban dictator, Fulgencia Batista, to hold free elections and to allow the people to determine their own future. He thought that Eisenhower had thus failed to properly stand up to the Communists and maintain America's image.

The actual existence of Castro in Cuba was not the immediate problem to Kennedy. Instead he was concerned with the spread of Soviet Communist influence at a pace exceeding that of American predominance in the Third World. "You do not have to look 90 miles beyond the coast of the United States if you think different."[14] Kennedy also believed that the United States had presented a tired image to the world. This fact, he claimed, indicated that the nation's brightest days had passed and helped make it appear as if it were the Communists who were reaching for the future and not the Americans.[15] During a televised press conference in Portland,

Maine on September 2, he stated that he thought "the big task of the next administration is going to be to contain this revolution in Cuba, itself, and not have it spread through Latin America."[16] Thus Kennedy expressed his idea that containment should be enlarged to restrict the impact of Castroism in the Western Hemisphere.

Kennedy made proposals to combat the advance of Communism in Latin America which revealed his Wilsonian concepts about the benevolence of democracy and the desire of all people to emulate the United States' form of government. He proposed revitalizing the good neighbor spirit of Franklin Roosevelt to provide a gradual increase in the standard of living for all Latin peoples. He supported an increase of the Voice of America broadcasts to Cuba to counter the anti-American propaganda of the Soviet Union and of Castro. Finally, he called for co-operation with the people and the governments of the other Latin American countries to attempt to isolate Castro until the Cuban people could regain their freedom. Kennedy's stated objective was "to contain Castro, to prevent him spreading his influence throughout all of Latin America."[17]

During the campaign Kennedy called for a united effort by the Organization of American States [OAS] to combat Castro and the spread of his ideas. He opposed unilateral action by the United States to achieve this objective. This attitude was best expressed during a question and answer session following a speech in Portland, Oregon on September 7. Asked about his opinions on the Monroe Doctrine, Kennedy replied that the part of the policy which still applied and to which the OAS adhered was the opposition to efforts by any nation to establish colonial rule in Latin America. He stressed the role of the United States as a partner in the group's united front while deemphasizing its

paternalistic image as policeman of the hemisphere. "We are going to have to wait and see what happens in Cuba. But, any action that we do take, in my opinion, should be taken in concert with the Organization of American States."[18]

In a telegram to Vice President Nixon dated October 23 Kennedy stated that "I have never advocated and I do not now advocate intervention in Cuba in violation of our treaty obligations and in fact stated in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, that whatever we did with regard to Cuba should be within the confines of international law."[19] What Kennedy had said at Johnstown on October 15 was significant because he was not actually speaking of American intervention against the Castro government per se. Instead he stated that "we must end the harrassment, which this Government has carried on, of liberty-loving anti-Castro forces in Cuba and in other lands. While we cannot violate international law, we must recognize that those exiles and rebels represent the real voice of Cuba, and should not be constantly handicapped by our Immigration and Justice Department authorities."[20] What Kennedy said was that Washington should not violate international law in reference to the anti-Castro forces, not in reference to Castro.

The main thrust of Kennedy's campaign statements on Cuba was a call for a firmer and tougher stance by the government. United States-Cuban relations actually reached the forefront of his campaign in early October. Following the release of a report by the Senate Internal Security Sub-Committee, a group dominated by Democrats, he began his assault on the Eisenhower policies toward Cuba. The report charged that Cuba had been handed over to the Communists by a group of Americans much the same as China had been in 1949.[21] During his fourth televised

debate with Nixon, the Senator sharply criticized the Eisenhower team for permitting the establishment of a Communist base only ninety miles from the United States.[22] His attack against the Administration's lack of firmness had been expressed before at Alexandria when he said "we have within 90 miles by the same group who have stood up to Khrushchev, we have Castro, who attacks us daily."[23]

The attack achieved a high point at Johnstown, Pennsylvania. After referring to Franklin Roosevelt's warning to the Nazis in 1940 to stay out of the Western Hemisphere and Harry Truman's warning to the Communists in 1947 to stay out of Greece and Turkey, Kennedy stated that the Communists would not have achieved a stronghold in Cuba had the Republican leadership had heeded these experiences to prevent it. "I do not know how Mr. Nixon can talk of firmness in view of his party's record in Cuba," Kennedy declared. He presented five proposals to deal with the Cuban situation. First, he called for an explicit expression by Voice of America broadcasts of the American determination that the Cubans would someday regain their freedom. Second, he demanded that Immigration and Departments' harrassment of the anti-Castro forces in Cuba and in other areas be ceased. Third, he recommended that Castro be made to understand that the United States would no longer be "pushed around," would not yield the naval base at Guantanamo, or be denied just compensation for confiscated American property. Fourth, he felt Khrushchev should know that no further expansion of Communism in the Western Hemisphere would be tolerated and that Washington would supply the OAS with whatever strength needed to stop Communist penetration. Finally, he believed Cuban Communism could best be countered throughout Latin America by strengthening the cause of freedom and liberty through a program of

alliance.

Thus John Kennedy expressed his belief that Communism could be contained within Cuba. His policy was to be constructed on a solid foundation of stringent economic sanctions against Cuba, an active anti-Castro force supported by the United States, and a strong OAS. He found after his election that the anti-Castro force was already being prepared by the CIA. The economic sanctions imposed by Eisenhower led to the severing of diplomatic relations with Havana on January 3, 1961. The only one of Kennedy's goals which was never actually filled was the comprehensive OAS effort to confine Castroism in Cuba.

The Plan Becomes Known

Although CIA activities were intended to be covert, the fact that the service was working with a group of Cuban exiles became well known by the end of 1960. One of the first reports of the activity appeared in November. The Hispanic American Report, published by Stanford University, reported widespread belief among responsible Guatemalans that the CIA was training Cuban exiles at a base in Retalhuleu for an invasion of Cuba. Dr. Ronald Hilton, Director of Hispanic American Studies at Stanford, had learned of the clandestine activities during a recent visit to the central American country.[25]

An editorial on Dr. Hilton's report appeared November 19 in The Nation. The author believed that all news agencies could and should check the report with Guatemalan correspondents to bring all the facts into the open. The essay contained three significant elements. First, during Dr. Hilton's trip he had been informed that the CIA had recently purchased a large tract of land for more than $1 million. The area was

securely fenced and well guarded. He was further told "that it is 'common knowledge' in Guatemala that the tract is being used as a training ground for Cuban counterrevolutionaries" preparing for an eventual invasion of Cuba. Second, this information had been printed in the Guatemalan newspaper La Hora by Clemente Marroguin Rojas, a reputable news commentator, reportedly in violation of a government prohibition against public discussion of the matter. Finally, President Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes had taken cognizance of the reports and admitted the base's existence during a recent television appearance. He refused, however, to discuss the purpose or any other sensitive facts about the activity.[26]

Reports continued to appear during the remainder of 1960 and in early 1961 implicating the United States in clandestine activity in Guatemala. On January 16 under the headline "U.S. Helps Train an Anti-Castro Force At Secret Guatemalan Air-Ground Base," the New York Times reported that a force was being drilled in guerilla warfare and assisted with supplies and the construction of facilities by the United States ostensibly for defensive purposes against an "almost inevitable clash with Cuba."[27] Although such reports continued to appear throughout the winter months, officials in Washington denied American involvement. According to Pierre Salinger

> in the weeks before the invasion, hardly a day passed without a story appearing in some newspaper, or broadcast over some radio or television station. It is fair to say that some of the press went after the story as if it were a scandal at city hall, or a kidnaping--not a military operation whose entire success might depend on the elements of surprise and secrecy.

He cited Kennedy as telling him "a week before the invasion: 'I can't believe what I'm reading! Castro doesn't need agents over here. All he has to do is read our papers. It's all laid out for him'."[28] The

only information Castro lacked in the days just prior to the invasion was the exact date and place for which it was scheduled.

Kennedy first learned the full extent of the project during a meeting he had in Palm Beach, Florida on November 17, 1960.[29] Sorensen reported that CIA Director Allen Dulles and Bissell astonished Kennedy with the magnitude and the daring of the operation. "He told me later that he had grave doubts from that moment on."[30]

Prior to taking office, Kennedy had two conferences with Eisenhower during which national and world affairs were considered. Although the Cuban question clearly worried Eisenhower, he considered it less urgent than Laos.[31] The second of these meetings, held on January 19, 1961, began privately and then was expanded to include the advisers of both men. The conversation focused on developing crisis situations. Eisenhower said that current policy toward Cuba was to give maximum aid to the anti-Castro forces. He stated that Washington was assisting in training exiles in Guatemala and recommended that this be continued and intensified.[32] Schlesinger made a significant point when he wrote that the Eisenhower Administration "in the main . . . did not try to inveigle Kennedy into underwriting its policies."[33] Thus the question became why, if Kennedy had reservations about the venture as serious as Sorensen suggested, did he allow it to be continued?

During Kennedy's early months in office his advisers on foreign policy appeared to agree about what course the government should pursue. Eisenhower had warned that definite action would be required in a number of crisis areas. Yet, no one at that time strongly advocated American intervention. On the other hand, no available evidence indicates that anyone strongly opposed involvement in the troubled areas. The Kennedy

people all believed that the important task was to present an image to the Third World that could successfully counter the increasing influence of the Communist states.

Dulles and Bissell advised Kennedy during their meeting to give the invasion project close attention. To succeed, the venture would require his total dedication. Kennedy never assumed a posture of total commitment to the operation. At first, he favored it because an invasion would serve to fulfill his campaign promises and prove that he was prepared to stand up to the Communists. Later, his advisers began to have reservations about the effects such an act would have on the Third World and the neutral nations. The members of the Kennedy Administration and Cabinet split over the project. Among the supporters was the President's brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy. The advisers who opposed the idea during its later planning stages did not openly object when they first learned of the operation. It was their advice which caused Kennedy to alter the plans gradually and avoid a total commitment to the invasion's success. Fearful of appearing weak before the country's opponents, Kennedy also wanted to present a resolute image to his divided advisers. Therefore he allowed the project to continue but without the total commitment required for success.

Kennedy limited American participation to recruiting, financing, training, equipping, and counseling the force. He specifically ruled out the use of American armed forces, officers, and advisers in combat. He insisted that the mission maintain a strictly Cuban appearance. It became evident that the force would be entirely on its own once it arrived within the territorial waters of Cuba. The exiles were supplied with obsolete aircraft and decrepit shipping to preclude identification

of their equipment with that used by the American armed forces. The exile leaders failed to comprehend the full implications of the restrictions and continued to believe, as they had rightfully done while Eisenhower held office, that the United States would not permit them to be defeated, whatever the cost. They were convinced that the American position would adapt itself to conditions and that the reservations would vanish in case of an emergency.[34]

An event of major importance which later handicapped Kennedy's Cuban policy occurred during the first days of 1961. A military parade in Cuba on January 2 included many Soviet and Soviet bloc arms. Castro announced that these represented only a "small part" of the arms which had been received. The same day he demanded the United States Embassy in Havana be reduced to eleven staff members within the next forty-eight hours.[35] During the speech Castro denounced the Embassy as a center for counterrevolution, subversion, and espionage. The eleven people to be left would make the mission comparable in size to the Cuban mission in Washington. While the latter group had been inactive, the Americans had maintained contact with the Cuban government, performed legitimate functions of interest for the American Government and business operations in Cuba, and served the Cuban refugees desiring to leave Cuba.[36] On January 3 diplomatic relations were formally severed in compliance with Castro's demand.[37]

Soon after this, Castro intensified his verbal attacks against the United States. Convinced that a joint invasion by the Cubans being trained in Guatemala and United States Marines was imminent, he ordered a full-scale military mobilization to repel it. The invasion scare subsided briefly when Castro expressed hopes for improved relations

following Kennedy's inauguration. However, Philip Bonsal points out, "President Kennedy's inauguration in fact brought with it no change in the Cuban policy of the United States government. The overthrow of Castro was the objective of that policy--an overthrow to be encompassed by all means short of an involvement on Cuban soil of American armed forces."[38]

The situation the new President faced in Cuba was, to say the least, tense. Besides the termination of diplomatic relations, trade was also coming to a halt. Counteracting economic measures by Eisenhower during 1960, the Soviet Union assumed the responsibility for Cuba's economic survival, and the Castro regeme confiscated all private property significant to production. Washington failed to understand extreme anti-American feeling in Cuba as the Soviets increased the supply of arms and equipment for anti-invasion preparations.[39]

Between the days of his election and inauguration, Kennedy created a number of task forces to study the problems he felt would require his attention. One of these, under the chairmanship of Dr. Adolf Berle, Jr., studied United States-Latin American relations. The task force resulted directly from a campaign speech Kennedy delivered in Tampa, Florida, on October 18. The speech was cut due to shortness of time and Kennedy thus omitted the section concerning his program for Latin America. Sorensen reported that Kennedy guaranteed reporters after his speech that although the Latin American program had not been discussed, he was firmly committed to the ideas as they had been circulated in the advanced release of his text.

> Our new policy can best be summed up in the Spanish words 'alianza para progresso,' an alliance in progress--an alliance of nations with a common interest in freedom and

> economic advance in a great common effort to develop the resources of the entire hemisphere, strengthen the forces of democracy, and widen the vocational and educational opportunities of every person in all the Americas. This policy also means constant consultation with Latin American nations on hemispheric problems, as well as on issues of world wide significance. And it is an alliance, not merely directed against communism, but aimed at helping our sister republics for their own sake.[40]

Berle, an advocate of a pro-democratic hemispheric policy, appeared to be a natural choice to lead the task force. He had served under Roosevelt as Ambassador to Brazil and as Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs. His major drawback was his tendency to equate current conditions with past events. These included comparing firmness against Castro who was aiding the Communists in the hemisphere to resistance against Juan Perón of Argentina who had abetted the Nazis prior to World War II. His analogy concluded that as the Truman Doctrine alone had failed to contain Communism in Europe, those efforts presently being applied against Castroism would likewise prove unsuccessful. His solution was that the Alliance for Progress be applied in a fashion similar to the Marshall Plan.[41] Berle hoped that a new policy of practical sensitivity to the needs of the Latin Americans would result in a consensus on the Castro issue. It soon became evident, however, that not all members of the OAS were going to support an anti-Castro policy.[42]

The Plain's Gradual Dismantling

Soon after taking office Kennedy requested and received a briefing on the conditions and the prospects of the project from Dulles and Bissell. After their conference he asked for the technical opinion of the JCS on the plan's feasibility. The operation had not been the

responsibility of the Defense Department and the JCS had reviewed it only once before, during January, at Eisenhower's request. Kennedy was now asking for their evaluation of its validity.

Since its conception the previous March, the plan had greatly expanded. The aim now was to create a force of about 1,000 men, and invade Cuba near the city of Trinidad on the southern coast. Charles Murphy maintains that

> It was never explicitly claimed by the CIA that a general uprising was immediately in the cards; the intention was to sow enough chaos during the first hours to prevent Castro from smashing the invasion on the beach. Once the beachhead was consolidated, however, and if fighting gear went forward steadily to guerrillas elsewhere in Cuba, the planners were confident that a mass revolt could be stimulated.

Finally, the plan still presupposed that American military assistance would be available if its use became imperative for success.[43]

The JCS judged the plan tactically sound and awarded it a high probability of success. Castro possessed an air force of approximately thirty-one planes. The idea of the plan was to destroy all of these on the ground before the actual invasion began. The CIA and the JCS felt that if an initial air strike failed in this objective, later opportunities would provide for eventual success. They presumed that, in the case of an emergency, rapid and dimmutive aid could be supplied by aircraft carriers sailing just beyond the horizon. The entire operation, considering the size of the landing force, depended on the complete control of the air over the beach. The exiles' B-26's were to operate from a base in Nacaragua over 500 miles from Cuba. The round trip flight would require more than six hours thus permitting only 30 to 40 minutes of bombing or supporting time. Therefore, it was essential that

Castro's jets, which could fly over any point in Cuba in a matter of minutes, be destroyed before they could enter into the action.[44]

In late January, Kennedy authorized the CIA to continue the planning. At the same time he cautioned that the operation might be cancelled at any time. The CIA set a tentative date of March 1 for the invasion. This deadline proved unrealistic due to the need for time to organize the exile leaders in New York and Miami into a workable coalition, the belief that 1,400 men would be needed to secure and hold a beachhead, and the feeling that the brigade needed general strengthening. The date for the invasion slipped until it finally reached April 17.[45]

During February and March the attitude among Washington officials began to change. Kennedy was reportedly skeptical about the size of the force and the wisdom of causing an international commotion so early in his term. Some of his closest advisers began to have second thoughts about the immorality of masked aggression, although none counseled the project's cancellation. It was the influence of Schlesinger and other close aides expressed during this period which led Kennedy to change the plan.[46] Near unanimous opposition to overt American involvement developed. Kennedy's advisers felt that any such action would create unrest among the leading nations of Latin America who, with the exception of Venezuela, had refused to participate in anti-Castro activity of any nature. The impact would also be felt among the neutral nations of Africa and Asia whose good will the advisers desired. Officials in the White House and the State Department began to seek ways of softening the shock of the action on these countries. Considerations of the country's image began to take priority over military needs for a successful operation.[47]

Under Secretary of State Chester Bowles became one of the first

opponents of the operation. Bowles first learned of the plan in late March while acting as Secretary of State in the absence of Dean Rusk who was attending a Southeast Asia Treaty Organization /SEATO/ conference in Bangkok, Thailand. He was horrified by the plan and immediately prepared a memo for Rusk expressing his disapproval. At the same time, he requested permission to take his case to the President if the Secretary disagreed with the objections when he returned. By giving the impression that the operation would be toned down to a guerilla action, Rusk quietened his subordinate's objections.[48]

Kennedy presided over a final review of the invasion plan at a Department of State meeting on April 4. Among those present were Rusk, McNamara, Treasury Secretary C. Douglas Dillon, General Lyman Lemnitzer, Allen Dulles, Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Nitze, Presidential aide McGeorge Bundy, Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs Thomas Mann, Latin American specialists Berle, Schlesinger, and Richard Goodwin, and J. W. Fulbright.[49] Senator Fulbright appeared to be the only articulate opponent of the invasion among Kennedy's top advisers attending the session. Two significant points can be made about the meeting. First, Chester Bowles and United Nations Ambassador Adlai Stevenson both agreed with Fulbright's position but were not in attendance.[50] The second point, in view of the developments which were forthcoming and the stand he was to take, was the absence of express consent by Dean Rusk.[51]

Newspaper articles during March about the forecasted invasion had caused Fulbright to become increasingly alarmed. At Kennedy's invitation he flew to Florida with the President for the Easter weekend. On March 30 he presented Kennedy with a memorandum that he had been preparing the day

before with the assistance of Pat Holt, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff. Fulbright presented what he viewed as the two alternatives available for dealing with the Castro government. These were either to overthrow the regime or to tolerate and attempt to isolate it. He opposed the first possibility on several grounds. First, he doubted the Cuban guerilla forces were strong enough to perform the task. If the effort appeared to be in danger of failing, the United States would be tempted to intervene. An outside attack would be impossible to conceal and would seriously damage the work of the past thirty years toward improved relations with Latin America. Second, if successful, the venture would commit the government to the maintenance of any post-Castro government. Fulbright doubted the leadership abilities of the exiles and felt that if they failed, the United States would be blamed. Finally, he believed that any such venture would be a violation of the spirit, if not the letter, of the OAS Charter, hemispheric treaties, and national statutes.

Instead Fulbright opted for a policy of containment. He believed the Alliance for Progress provided the means by which Castro could be isolated and the Cuban people attracted to join in the spirit of hemispheric solidarity. Lazo wrote that Fulbright felt isolation by the Alliance would cause Castro "by virtue of his extravagances" to isolate himself further and provide the opportunity for an internal revolt.[52]

The April 4 meeting began with Bissell's forceful briefing on the project and his explanation of the necessity of destroying Castro's air force on the ground. Dulles followed with a summation of the risks involved and the prospects of success. Kennedy then began asking each person present for his opinion. Karl Meyer and Tad Szule report that

"all members of the official family who were asked supported the plan."[53] Senator Fulbright's was the only dissenting voice. He emphatically denounced the entire operation, as Schlesinger wrote, as "wildly out of proportion to the threat. It would compromise our moral position in the world and make it impossible for us to protest treaty violations by the Communists."[54]

A surprising fact was that this criticism, coming from the man whom Kennedy had first wanted as his Secretary of State, did not cause the President to cancel the operation. Besides the fear of appearing weak, Kennedy wanted to avoid any action which would create a negative attitude toward the United States in the world. He failed to make the commitments vital to the project's success thus creating a situation which might make him appear weak and irresolute. Washington had been accusing the Soviet Union of interfering in the internal affairs of other countries. Without a complete success in the Cuban venture, American involvement was sure to be revealed. This would damage the image Kennedy wanted the nation to portray as the champion of liberty and independence as well as defiant opponent to external involvement in a country's internal affairs. His concern for world opinion was revealed in the early changes he had made in the plan.

Originally the invasion was planned for Casilda near the city of Trinidad. The population in the two cities numbered approximately 23,000 people, many of whom were considered strongly anti-Castro. The site offered the advantages of sufficient distance from Havana to prevent Castro's concentrated forces from arriving before a beachhead could be secured, an airfield suitable to meet the invaders' needs except that it was inadequate for the B-26's, and the opportunity to escape to the nearby

Escambray Mountains from which a prolonged guerilla campaign could be waged if anything went wrong. The CIA, with JCS concurrance, had selected the site and had named no alternate area.[55]

This Trinidad Plan became one of the early victims of Kennedy's modifications. The change resulted from a National Security Council /NSC/ meeting on March 11. During this session Kennedy and his advisers appeared to reach a consensus that a landing at Trinidad would be too spectacular. There was a danger that it would require more involvement by the United States. This would have further exposed American participation to the world criticism Kennedy wanted to avoid. During the next four days the CIA planners studied alternate sites. The three they selected were submitted for approval to the JCS on March 14. The Chiefs agreed, according to Schlesinger, that one area "with its airstrip and the natural defense provided by its swamps, seemed the best of the three but added softly that they still preferred Trinidad." The Zapata plan was presented at a conference by Bissell on the fifteenth and the invasion site was changed to an area 100 miles west of Trinidad around Cochinos Bay--the Bay of Pigs. Kennedy, after hearing the plan made some suggestions "mostly intended to 'reduce the noise level'." Of these, the primary recommendation was that the invasion and the unloading of the ships be completed prior to daybreak.[56]

The new site offered similar advantages to the Trinidad area. Recent reconnaisance photographs had revealed no major Cuban troop concentration, and the airstrip in the nearby village of Girón was capable of handling all of the brigade's aircraft. The one disadvantage was the absence of any territory to which the invaders could easily escape and from which they could carry out a protracted war. "Nevertheless," wrote Schlesinger,

"the fact that the CIA and the Joint Chiefs, though they still preferred Castilda, were willing to accept Girón, shows that they believed the operation as then planned was very likely to succeed" [emphasis in original].[57]

The essential element of the plan, and the one which created the greatest amount of controversy following the attempted invasion, was the use of air power. The number of strikes called for was the first aspect debated. Sorensen and Schlesinger both reported that two pre-invasion air strikes had been planned to destroy Castro's air force.[58] Mario Lazo reported that Bissell told him "three strikes all at full strength" had been planned.[59] Richard Nixon wrote that "two of the three Free Cuban air strikes designed to knock out Castro's air force were cancelled, depriving the invasion of air support." The allegation was repeated when, while referring to a meeting he had with Kennedy on April 20, he wrote that the President mentioned being assured by the CIA and military experts that the project would succeed but omitted references to recommendations he had received from State Department and White House personnel to cancel two air strikes.[60]

The three strikes, as originally planned, were to employ sixteen planes and take place on Saturday, Sunday, and Monday prior to the landing on the seventeenth. The objective of the first raid was to destroy as many of Castro's planes on the ground as possible. During the second strike, the exile pilots were to bomb tank, truck, and mobile-gun concentrations. At the same time a gunboat near Cienfuegos was to be sunk. Any planes lost during these attacks were to be replaced by the United States. Once the landing party had secured the airstrip at Giron the base of operations was to be moved there from Puerto Cabezas,

Nicaragua enabling the Cuban pilots to provide better cover for the ground forces.[61]

Only the first of these three planned strikes was ever flown. It had been reduced from the intended size of sixteen planes to eight due to the State Department argument that the strength of the raid was too great to permit concealment of American involvement. The second strike was cancelled for the same reason about a week before the invasion after Kennedy's political advisers decided that two raids would be sufficient. This move alarmed the CIA and the JCS personnel involved who now recommended that the entire operation be cancelled. After further review of the plan, even they agreed that two strikes would be sufficient to destroy the aircraft which were concentrated at one base near Havana and under constant surveillance.[62]

The strike on the morning of April 15 went off as planned. Although some of Castro's planes were destroyed, its objectives were not fully realized and the events which followed destroyed any remaining chance for success and greatly damaged United States prestige. The planes, flying at low altitude, succeeded in surprising Castro's forces. They bombed the airports at San Antonio de los Baños and Santiago de Cuba and Camp Columbia in Havana. The Cuban pilots and their American supervisors in Guatemala considered the raid a success.[63] As the events which followed were to rpove, it was actually a dismal failure.

Consistent with the efforts to minimize the appearance of American participation, a cover story was devised to blame the first air raid on Castro's own pilots who supposedly committed the act while in the process of defecting. The plan called for one pilot to fly directly from Nicaragua to Florida. Upon arriving in Miami he activated the story by

announcing himself as a defector who had just bombed Cuban airbases. The deception was soon revealed by photographs and internal discrepancies within the different stories released. President Kennedy had allowed himself to be convinced that the truth of the origin of the plane would not be discovered for some time.

That afternoon the news of the raid brought forth outspoken reactions. At the proposal of Valerian Zorin of the Soviet Union, a special session of the United Nations Political Committee was called. Raúl Roa, Castro's Foreign Minister, denounced the action before the committee and accused the United States of being responsible. When Roa concluded his denunciation, Adlai Stevenson began his rebuttal of the charges and unwittingly stepped into what had to be one of the most humiliating situations of his distinguished career. Schlesinger and Tracy Barnes had conferred with Stevenson on April 8. However, Schlesinger reported, their discussion, "which was probably vague, left Stevenson with the impression that no action would take place during the UN discussion of the Cuban item" scheduled to begin on April 17.[64] Thus Stevenson learned that some act was to occur and had only this one brief opportunity to express his objections to Schlesinger. He was not aware of the magnitude of the plans and based his denial at the United Nations on the facts as they had been given to him.

Stevenson began his speech by reaffirming a statement Kennedy had made during a news conference on April 12. In response to a question as to the extent of assistance that would be given to an anti-Castro uprising or Cuban invasion, Kennedy said

> First, I want to say that there will not be, under any conditions, an intervention in Cuba by the United States Armed Forces. This Government will do everything it possibly can,

> and I think it can meet its responsibilities, to make sure that there are no Americans involved in any actions inside Cuba.
>
> The basic issue in Cuba is not one between the United States and Cuba. It is between the Cubans themselves. I intend to see that we adhere to that principle and as I understand it this administration's attitude is so understood and shared by the anti-Castro exiles from Cuba in this country.[65]

Stevenson categorically rejected Roa's charges. First, he said that the United States would take all possible steps to prevent American participation in any action against Cuba. Next, in view of the actions of that morning and the defections of two other Cubans the day before, he said the United States would consider the requests made for political asylum in the normal manner. Finally, he flatly denied any connection between the United States government and the two planes which had landed in Florida. Displaying a photograph of one of the planes, Stevenson pointed out "the markings of the Castro Air Force right on the tail." He reported that steps had been taken to impound the planes and they would not be permitted to take-off again for Cuba.[66]

Despite the CIA's efforts to camouflage the planes with the Cuban star and Fuerza Aerea Revolucionaria markings they were quickly identified by professional observers as not belonging to Castro. Castro's B-26's were made with plexiglass while those the United States had given the exiles had opaque noses.[67] This emphasized the extent to which the administration was willing to go to protect an image of noninvolvement and the futility of such efforts.

When Stevenson learned of the trick he threatened to resign if a second air raid were flown. He telephoned Rusk insisting that another strike would place the country in an untenable position at the United

Nations. Rusk capitulated to Stevenson's argument and concluded "that no further strikes should be launched until the planes could fly (or appear to fly) from the beachhead." Bundy agreed with this decision and they called Kennedy who had gone to Glen Ora, Virginia, the day before. After a lengthy conversation, Kennedy complied and directed that the remaining air strike be cancelled.[68]

Thus Castro was permitted to maintain control of the air. This decision had been made entirely on political considerations and without regard for military realities. Despite subsequent requests for aerial action, Rusk and then Kennedy upheld the decision and the invasion was doomed. The decision had been made in an effort to reduce the extent of United States involvement, placate world opinion, and appease Adlai Stevenson.[69]

The Aftermath of Failure

The Bay of Pigs fiasco followed the successful Soviet space flight of Yuri Gagarin by five days and marked a low point in Kennedy's career and American prestige in the world. Castro's boast that he had repelled an American invasion was relayed by Moscow and Peking to all corners of the globe. His somewhat tarnished image had been given new strength, and instead of being overthrown he was now more solidly entrenched than before. United States stature in Latin America, the Near East, Southeast Asia, and Europe fell drastically. While world opinion turned sharply against the United States, Americans experienced sorrow, humiliation, and shame.[70] Castro's December announcement of his conversion to Marxism-Leninism added the final shock to the defeat of the techniques Kennedy had selected to deal with the petty Caribbean dictator who had succeeded in irritating the United States government into commiting a counterrevolutionary act.

Following the disaster, Kennedy accepted full responsibility for the incident. He disapproved of recrimination and a search for scapegoats. His assumption of responsibility was morethan a gesture of generosity. Bonsal believes that "it was a highly creditable recognition of the truth of the matter."[71] As has been seen, during his presidential campaign Kennedy had promised a more vigorous and successful course toward Cuba. The plans he inherited from Eisenhower provided the vehicle by which he would attempt to fulfill that promise.

Although Kennedy accepted the responsibility for the operation's failure, efforts were immediately made to place the blame elsewhere. Walter Lippmann accused Rusk and Schlesinger of failing to tie completely the hands of the military and the CIA. Administration sources inspired newspaper articles blaming Eisenhower despite Kennedy's appeals to Republican leaders and the former President for bipartisan support.[72] The most adamant attacks came from such Kennedy admirers as Schlesinger and Sorensen who blamed the debacle on the CIA and the JCS. Schlesinger reported that by Friday, April 21, Kennedy "felt that he now knew certain soft spots in his administration, especially the CIA and the Joint Chiefs. He would never be overawed by professional military advice again."[73]

Along this same line, Sorensen attacked the plan, and its formulators for the failure. He wrote that the key to the Bay of Pigs decision was Kennedy's failure to realize the actual nature of the plan he was authorizing. "With hindsight it is clear that what in fact he had approved was diplomatically unwise and militarily doomed from the outset. What he thought he was approving appeared at the time to have diplomatic acceptability and little chance of outright failure."

Sorensen built his defense on five points. First, he claimed that Kennedy had been misled into believing the operation, though large-scale, would be relatively unspectacular and quiet with the air strike being the only really noisy element. Second, he thought the plan he approved enabled the brigade, if unsuccessful on the beach, to join the guerillas in the mountains. Sorensen claimed that this was never part of the plan. Although Kennedy had been assured otherwise, the area was inappropriate for guerilla activity. Most of the exiles had not received guerilla training, and the route to the Escambray Mountains was so long, swampy, and well covered by Castro's forces that it was an unrealistic alternative. Third, Kennedy believed the Cuban exiles were choosing to take the risks without any overt American support while the Cubans mistakenly believed that aid and support would be supplied. Thus a lack of adequate communication added to the confusion. Fourth, he had been so misled about Castro's popularity that he believed a mass revolt would occur. "In short, the President had given his approval with the understanding that there were only two possible outcomes--a national revolt or a flight to the hills--and in fact neither was remotely possible." Finally, the estimates of Castro's strength were inaccurate. He already possessed the capability to defeat an invasion.[74]

All of Kennedy's White House supporters maintained that serious miscalculations were inherent in the plan. The assessment was that Kennedy had listened to bad advice and had failed to detect the errors.[75] Sorensen listed three fundamental gaps which allowed this to occur. The newness of Kennedy and his administration in office had not allowed time for proper evaluation of various advisers, i.e., the CIA and the JCS, and for the President to gain the confidence needed to dispute the

experts and to shape the decision-making process to his own desires. Second, the plan had been insufficiently considered by all except the CIA and the JCS due to the supposed pressures of time and secrecy thus limiting the number of people Kennedy could ask for advice. Finally, again due to the Administration's newness, they were not prepared to handle a crisis situation and those previously committed to the project were therefore allowed to dominate.[76]

Two days after the attempted invasion, Kennedy appointed a committee to investigate the CIA and its role in the venture. Heading the group were General Maxwell Taylor and Robert Kennedy, both of whom subsequently became increasingly involved in foreign policy decisions. They were joined by Allen Dulles and Admiral Arleigh Burke, the Chief of Naval Operations. These appointments appeared dubious because all of the men, with the exception of Taylor, who had not been mentioned earlier in relation to the venture, had been advocates of the operation. Roger Hilsman wrote that the

> analysis showed that from a military point of view everything about the operation was inadequate--the number of men, the equipment, the air support, the ammunition--and the Taylor Committee concluded that an agency like the CIA was poorly suited for carrying out operations on that scale. In the future, CIA would continue to have responsibility for the kind of 'covert political action' that would, for example, head off a Communist attempt to gain control of a foreign labor union. But responsibility for para-military operations would be assigned to a special warfare section of the Pentagon.[77]

No report or findings by the Taylor Committee have been made public to date. News leaks provided a basis for articles based on gossip, conjecture, and dubious evidence. A secret report prepared by Hilsman was suppressed at the request of Robert Kennedy.[78] The Attorney General, the only member of the group to speak publicly on the subject, claimed

that victory was never near. Pentagon and intelligence officials, however, continued to believe that the plan would have succeeded if carried out as originally designed. About the only point the White House, the Pentagon, and the CIA agreed upon, wrote Tom Flaherty in Life in 1963, was that "at no time did the government promise [air] support by United States forces of any kind."[79] This fact had been made clear to the exile leaders and the brigade officers although they "believed, until the end, that the U.S. would not let their invasion fail. They were wrong."[80]

A week prior to the invasion Kennedy sent a CIA official to Guatemala specifically to emphasize to the CFF that they would receive no support from American forces.[81] In May, 1963, Life printed what was purported to be a previously classified record of communications between Washington and a military adviser in Guatemala on April 13, 1961. The main point of Washington's message was that Kennedy had "stated under no conditions will the U.S. intervene with any U.S. forces." The reply expressed confidence in the brigade's ability to achieve its objectives and the belief that an internal uprising would result. The brigade and battalion commanders

> say they know their own people and believe that after they have inflicted one serious defeat upon the opposition forces, the latter will melt away from Castro, whom they have no wish to support. They say it is a Cuban tradition to join a winner and they have supreme confidence they will win against anything Castro has to offer.

On the subject of American assistance he reported that "the brigade officers do not expect help from U.S. Armed Forces. They ask only for continued delivery of supplies. This can be done covertly."[82]

The invasion of Cuba revealed much about Kennedy's attitudes about

the world and the role of America therein. He espoused his belief in the principles of the Monroe Doctrine as a means of preventing the entry of Communism into the Western Hemisphere during an address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors on April 20, 1961.

> Any unilateral American intervention, in the absence of external attack upon ourselves or an ally, would have been contrary to our traditions and to our international obligations. But let the record show that our restraint is not inexhaustible. Should it ever appear that the inter-American doctrine of non-interference merely conceals or excuses a policy of nonaction--if the nations of this Hemisphere should fail to meet their commitments against aoutside Communist penetration--then I want it clearly understood that this Government will not hesitate in meeting its primary obligations which are to the security of our Nation![83]

Yet, the United States did violate an international agreement to which it was a party. Chapter III, Article 15 of the Charter of the Organization of American States provided that:

> No State or group of States has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, for any reason whatever, in the internal or external affairs of any other State. The foregoing principle prohibits not only armed force but also any other form of interference or attempted threat against the personality of the State or against its political, economic and cultural elements.[84]

Schlesinger wrote that Kennedy learned greatly from the Bay of Pigs incident. The main lesson was to listen in the future to "the people he had worked with longest, knew best, and trusted most." The lesson "was never to rely on the experts." Instead, Kennedy expanded his advisers for consultation. Robert Kennedy and Theodore Sorensen became his right-hand men in crisis situations. McGeorge Bundy became a White House aide for national security affairs. The people inherited from Eisenhower were replaced with Kennedy's own appointees. Finally, he picked Maxwell Taylor as his personal adviser on military affairs.[85]

It was these "non-experts" who became Kennedy's confidential

advisers and made recommendations for policy actions during the remainder of 1961. Despite the claims, Kennedy did not profit greatly from his mistakes. He continued to make his final decisions based primarily on the advice received from a selected group of advisers who told him what he wanted to hear. The idea that Communism must be contained remained vital to his policies. This fact was to be revealed even more when Kennedy went to Europe in late May for meetings with the heads of state of France, Great Britain, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

CHAPTER III

CONFRONTATION IN VIENNA

The Bay of Pigs fiasco preceded by six weeks a meeting that proved equal in importance and revealed the difference between the American and the Soviet views of the world. President Kennedy met with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev in Vienna, Austria on June 3 and 4. The conference presented each an opportunity to evaluate his primary adversary personally. Each was to leave Vienna with high regard for the other and an understanding that neither was willing to back away from a situation threatening his respective nation's interests. The conference did not ease Cold War tensions. Instead, Kennedy and Khrushchev reached a mutual understanding that nuclear weapons would be employed if the situation seemed to require them.

The two world leaders found little to agree on about international affairs. Each went to the conference with a set of objectives to be fulfilled, and neither left satisfied that these goals had been realized. The only major topic upon which any kind of agreement was made was the existing conflict in Laos. The discussions Kennedy and Khrushchev held on Laos and related problems were possibly most important as an indication of future American policies. The views Kennedy revealed about the Third World and the roles of the United States and the Soviet Union therein were of great significance. Kennedy viewed the Third World problem as an another aspect of the Cold War, Khrushchev believed it was a different

matter.[1]

What were these opinions and why were they of major importance? Kennedy's attitude at the conference negated any possibility of real progress toward the relaxation of tensions. What did he hope to gain? What was the real significance of the Vienna summit meeting and how did it affect United States policies during the ensuing months? Once again Kennedy's determination to present a resolute image prevented him from comprehending and learning from the advice that was offered in Europe.

The Vienna Summit

On May 12 Kennedy received a letter from Khrushchev renewing earlier suggestions that the two men meet. Kennedy took secret steps for a conference February 22 when he wrote the Premier expressing his willingness to meet if the time were favorable. During his presidential campaign he stated in Indianapolis, Indiana, on October 4, that "there is no sense having a meeting unless there is an atmosphere before the meeting which leads you to hope that there will be some success."[2] Robert Kennedy made this point clear to the Soviet Ambassador, who indicated that some progress on the problems of Laos and a test ban was conceivable. The President viewed this as a chance to define the future perspective of United States-Soviet relations. Although Kennedy believed the world was roughly balanced in terms of military might, he "saw" the world as in a state of uncontrollable change." This chaotic condition presented the chance that the two superpowers might become involved in a direct confrontation, something he felt it imperative to avoid.[3] Despite the recent Bay of Pigs venture, the failure of the current Geneva Conference to make any progress on the Laotian problem, and the

apparent deadlock of the Geneva test ban negotiations, he agreed to the meeting. Kennedy expanded a previously planned European trip to include a session with Khrushchev in Vienna, as Laurin Henry wrote, "not to conduct negotiations, but to get acquainted and sxchange views on outstanding problems."[4]

Prior to departing for Europe, Kennedy diligently studied the man he was to encounter. He reviewed Khrushchev's personal habits and policies as well as all potential topics of discussion.[5] Kennedy and his senior advisers believed that the Premier might have gotten the impression from the Bay of Pigs that the President was irresolute and incapable of taking drastic action in a crisis. Thus they suspected that Khrushchev hoped to "bully" the President and, at the least, attempt to renew Stalin's efforts to force the West out of Berlin.[6]

Despite the claim that the meeting was for the purpose of becoming acquainted, Kennedy did hope to reach some major agreements with Khrushchev. Laurin Henry believes that he wanted "to impress Khrushchev with American firmness so that the Russians would not make the mistake of overreaching at a moment of presumed American weakness."[7] Kennedy was preoccupied with the position of the country in the world and his personal image. After the Bay of Pigs he had become fearful of appearing weak and wanted an opportunity to allay that impression. Vienna provided the opportunity. Kennedy felt that the one most important impression he had to make on Khrushchev was that, although he was offering peaceful coexistence, he was also prepared to fight if the situation demanded it.[8]

Kennedy approached the meeting with an unyielding attitude. Among the points he repeatedly emphasized was his belief that the balance of power must be maintained as it currently existed. Again and again he

urged Khrushchev to maintain the existing balance of power militarily and geographically in favor of the United States.[9] A second concept he repeatedly stressed was that the two powers must avoid a direct confrontation in order to eliminate the possibility of a serious miscalculation by one of the other's interests and policies. Such an act, Kennedy felt, would lead to a devastating nuclear war. According to Sorensen Kennedy's main purpose was to make clear to Khrushchev the need to avoid situations which might result in the commitments of the interests of the two powers "in a direct confrontation from which neither could back down."[10]

The meetings themselves were a direct confrontation. Although they were cordial and civil, they were also argumentative. Sorensen wrote that generally it was Kennedy with his precise manner who carried the conversation and pressed Khrushchev on the important issues. Sorensen described Khrushchev's responses as "lengthy."[11] Each subject that arose precipitated a clash. Specifically, Khrushchev argued against the intimations that he might make a serious miscalculation.[12] The President's personal secretary, Evelyn Lincoln, described Kennedy as being "fidgety" after the first day and upon the conference's conclusion as being "deep in thought. . . . He shook his head as if to say it had been tough going."[13] The experience was indeed "tough going."

With de Gaulle in Paris

On the way to Vienna, Kennedy had stopped for meetings in Paris with French President Charles de Gaulle. In two days of talks, they covered the questions of Berlin, the Third World, NATO, and British membership in the Common Market. Of these, Berlin, Laos, and NATO appeared to receive the most attention and revealed the most about the two Presidents'

attitudes.

Kennedy prepared himself for the meeting by reading de Gaulle's own Memoirs. From the book he learned two major facts. For twenty years de Gaulle had held the conviction that the United States and Great Britain must not be permitted to block French predominance in Western Europe and that all of Europe, including a disarmed Germany and a reconciled Russia but never Britain, could be unified.[14] It proved tragic that although Kennedy acknowledged de Gaulle's convictions, he failed to heed the advice and the warnings the general gave him in Paris.

When the two leaders first met Kennedy came directly to the point about Berlin. Citing a statement Khrushchev had made to United States Ambassador Llewllyn Thompson about his commitment to Berlin following his speech of January 6, Kennedy presented what he believed to be the two alternatives open to the Allies. First, he felt that any discussion of the matter could be refused on the basis that the Western rights of presence and access and the current status of Berlin were non-negotiable. The alternative, he felt, was to indicate that the future status of Berlin was a possible topic for negotiations. Kennedy feared that this would present an image of weakness. President de Gaulle pointed out that Khrushchev had been warning and threatening the West about Berlin since 1958.[15]

Kennedy viewed the problem as one of Khrushchev's belief or lack of belief in western solidarity. Later in the day he returned to the question of proving the earnestness of the West to Khrushchev. The advice de Gaulle gave was to present the Premier with a firm position that the West could neither retreat from nor compromise on Berlin. He said that "when Khrushchev summons you to change the status of Berlin, in other words to

hand the city over to him, stand fast! That is the most useful service you can render to the whole world, Russia included."[16] The General was adamant about the fact that the Soviets, not the West, were seeking a change in Berlin. Schlesinger wrote that de Gaulle conceded that Khrushchev could sign a treaty with the East Germans but emphasized that "no internal communist document could alter the status of Berlin." The Western response to a show of force by Khrushchev would be a war and because the West was incapable of obtaining a military victory in Berlin it would become a general conflict. This, de Gaulle insisted, was the last thing Khrushchev wanted.[17]

Both men agreed that a more definite policy on Berlin had to be imposed. Kennedy felt that the current military strategy of reacting to Soviet probes was inadequate. He said that any new policy needed to be supported with action and "Khrushchev must understand that, if necessary, we would go to nuclear war." Apparently, de Gaulle agreed and added that the emphasis should be on Soviet vulnerability to economic sanctions and the development of new Western airlift techniques.[18] Thus Kennedy and de Gaulle agreed that the West should present a firm united front to the Soviets on the subject of Berlin. Kennedy gained the support of his ally on this issue. They were unable to achieve a similar concurrance of opinion about the Third World.

Following the discussion of Berlin, Kennedy turned the conversation to the Third World. This was possibly the most important and revealing topic covered during Kennedy's European trip. "It was above all on the subject of Indo-China that I pointed out to Kennedy how far apart our policies were," de Gaulle later wrote.[19] The general pointed out what France had learned from her unfortunate experience in Southeast Asia and

urged Kennedy not to intervene there. Instead he told Kennedy that "he was taking the wrong road." He would discover

> that intervention in this area will be an endless entanglement. Once a nation has been aroused, no foreign power, however strong, can impose its will upon it. You will discover this for yourselves. For even if you find local leaders who in their own interests are prepared to obey you, the people will not agree to it, and indeed do not want you. The ideology which you invoke will make no difference. Indeed, in the eyes of the masses it will become identified with your will to power. That is why the more you become involved out there against Communism, the more the Communists will appear as the champions of national independence, and the more support they will receive, if only from despair. . . . You Americans wanted to take our place in Indo-China. Now you want to take over where we left off and revive a war which we brought to an end. I predict that you will sink step by step into a bottomless military and political quagmire, however much you spend in men and money.

The general concluded that Kennedy had listened to his advice. "But," as he added, "events were to prove that I had failed to convince him."[20]

Schlesinger wrote that the French supported a neutralish coalition government under the leadership of Souvanna Phouma in Laos and that France would not intervene. But, he added, de Gaulle agreed not to oppose publicly the American policy if the threat of Western power were needed to gain an agreement from the Communists.[22] Thus Kennedy failed to gain the French support he desired for his Southeast Asian policies. Nor, did it appear, was he able to comprehend de Gaulle's advice and overcome his determination to oppose Communism in all corners of the globe.

The two Presidents later discussed the other topics mentioned above. But, as in the case of Laos, they were unable to reach any agreement. Kennedy left Paris with de Gaulle's full concurrence on only one subject that he was scheduled to discuss with Khrushchev. The talks had been

friendly and profitable, concerning a wide range of subjects and creating the misimpression that the two men had reached fundamental agreement on most. The joint statement released after the discussions emphasized that the Presidents had "confirmed the identity of their views on their commitments and responsibilities towards Berlin."[23] But Kennedy failed to comprehend fully the advice that de Gaulle offered on Southeast Asia, conveying the wisdom he gained from the ill-fated French experience. This failure to learn and Kennedy's unyielding views of the Third World were to play major roles in his subsequent talks with Khrushchev.

On To Vienna

President Kennedy arrived at Schwechat Airport in Vienna on the morning of June 3. He welcomed Khrushchev at the American Embassy at 12:45 p.m., and the two were soon seated along with their aides and interpreters for their conference. The talks began on an informal note but soon became tense. The formal meetings turned to the business at hand, reserving banter to the three meals during which they would have an opportunity for informal personal conversation.[24]

Kennedy opened the serious conversation by expressing his hope for improved relations between the two countries as a result of the talks. The question he was concerned with, as reported by Schlesinger, "was how two great nations, with different social systems, confronting each other across the world, could avoid head-on collision in an era of great change."[25] Khrushchev answered that this had been his objective for several years. He complained that it had been John Foster Dulles' wish to liquidate Communism that had blocked meaningful progress.

The conversation turned into a debate about the role of Communism

in the world. Kennedy asserted that the real problem had been Soviet efforts to impose their system on others through such means as wars of liberation where a minority would seize power against the wishes of the majority. To him this was not historical proof of the inevitable triumph of the Communist system. Khrushchev denied Kennedy's charge claiming that his system had earned the right to be recognized, to grow, and to develop. The Soviets, he contended, were against efforts to impose one system upon another. They expected to replace capitalism through the natural process of social development, just as that system had taken the place of feudalism. Kennedy replied that, while the two nations shared the responsibility for ideological competition, they should not allow this to affect the national interests of either state. Khrushchev understood this to mean that Communism should be allowed to exist only where it had already developed. This, he maintained, was an incorrect view and would lead to unavoidable conflict. "Ideas do not belong to one nation. Once born, they grew," he asserted. "No immunization was possible against them. The only rule was that they should not be propagated by arms nor by intervention in the internal affairs of other countries."[26] He guaranteed that the Soviet Union would not impose its political system on others by war.

To this, Sorensen wrote, Kennedy responded by quoting Mao Tse-Tung that "power was at the end of a rifle."[27] Khrushchev denied that Mao had said this claiming that he was a Marxist and Marxists were opposed to war. At this point Kennedy repeated the need for Khrushchev to understand the views held by the United States. Kennedy told him that it was his aspiration to secure peace.[28]

Khrushchev strongly disliked and objected to the term miscalculation

and its repeated usage. Kennedy explained that he meant simply erroneous judgements by one side of the other's next move. The need applied to all. He had made a bad decision about the Bay of Pigs. Both men would be required to judge the other's actions many times in the future. Sorensen wrote that "the whole purpose of their meeting was to introduce more precision into those judgements."[29]

Khrushchev gave no ground on this point. He often returned to the idea during the subsequent discussions that the Soviet Union was not responsible for every spontaneous uprising or Communist trend around the world. It was the policies of the United States, he claimed, that would cause national leaders such as Castro to reject capitalism in favor of Communism. He stated that the Soviet Union would assist local populations when their rights were infringed upon but that he opposed interfering with the choices the people made. Citing Soviet experience in guerilla warfare, he offered Kennedy some advice which went unheeded when he later made decisions concerning United States involvement in South Vietnam.

> If guerilla units should be sent from the outside and not supported by the people, that would be a hopeless undertaking. But if guerilla troops were local troops belonging to that country, then every bush was their ally.[30]

Kennedy failed to learn this and later chose to send American guerilla units into Vietnam where they would oppose native guerilla forces.

Following a break for lunch, the conference resumed, turning to the only topic upon which any agreement was achieved. Hilsmon wrote that Kennedy and Khrushchev concurred "that Laos should not become an issue between the two great powers."[31] Kennedy frankly admitted that the United States policy toward Laos had not always been correct and

expressed his desire to see it altered. Laos, in his view, was of no major strategic importance. The Pathet Lao stood for change, and he was unable to evaluate the true desires of the people. He wanted to decrease the American commitment but at the same time still he had responsibilities to the area due to the signing of the SEATO protocal in 1954. A solution had to be found which would secure the neutrality of Laos, verify a cease-fire, and permit both the United States and the Soviet Union to avoid committing their prestige over the problem.

Khrushchev, at first, appeared reluctant to discuss Laos specifically. He preferred to talk about reactionary governments and concepts of popular local movements. During this brief discussion before Kennedy could bring the conversation back to Laos specifically, he and Khrushchev revealed their different conceptions of revolution in the Third World. Revolutions presented the possibility of either a direct or an indirect confrontation.

Kennedy maintained that Khrushchev's speech on January 6 in which he voiced support for wars of liberation provided evidence marking the Soviets guilty of interference. Khrushchev again denied that the Soviets were responsible for every internal uprising in the world. Kennedy did not accept this and, in the tradition of the true Cold Warriors such as Dean Acheson, continued to seek a Communist conspiracy in every movement that threatened to disturb the balance of power and thus endanger the national interests of the United States. He was determined to prevent this if possible by presenting an image of determined opposition to the extension of Communism.

Schlesinger and Sorensen both credited Kennedy's persistence with bringing Khrushchev to an agreement on Laos. But the evidence they presented indicated that the Soviet leader was not vitally concerned

with the future of the Southeast Asian country and merely used the opportunity to discuss the opposing views on the future of change in the Third World in order to discover Kennedy's opinions on the topic. Schlesinger wrote that Khrushchev displayed "no great interest" in discussing Laos. According to Sorensen "he agreed finally that Laos was not worth a war to either power."[32] If Khrushchev had been as adamant about Laos as he was to prove to be on Berlin, Kennedy would not have been able to "persuade him to acquiesce" on the matter.

The Berlin Debate

The conventional view of the Vienna meetings, and that espoused by Schlesinger and Sorensen, has been that the event served as a trigger for the Berlin crisis of the summer of 1961. Although this was true to an extent, Vienna was more an occasion in the building conflict than its cause. Kennedy went with no intention of making even the slightest compromise on the Berlin issue. In fact he was unwilling even to negotiate the question at that time. In any case, the Berlin crisis had been developing since the end of World War II. The meeting with Khrushchev gave Kennedy an opportunity to directly present his determination to contain Communism to the world's single most powerful Communist.

Berlin was an issue during the 1960 Presidential campaign. When Kennedy referred to the problem he predicted that a major crisis would develop there in the first half of 1961. He also made clear his determination to maintain the United States' commitment. During a televised question and answer session in Seattle, Washington, on September 6, he told how he would react as President if East Germany and the Soviet

Union signed a defense treaty. Kennedy said that it would be a serious matter and the responsibility of the nation would be evident. "We have to make it clear and mean it that our guarantees to West Berlin are going to be maintained." He added that permitting the Soviets to drive the United States out of Berlin would endanger the nation's position in Europe and if a blockade of the city resulted it would be a threat to the country's security.[33]

On September 29 Kennedy referred to the intensity of the situation in Berlin twice. First, he remarked in Schenectady, New York, that "the next President of the United States is going to have to meet a crisis in Berlin, in the early days of his administration."[34] Later he spoke at a Democratic fund-raising dinner in Syracuse, New York, telling the audience that "the Berlin crisis is worse instead of better."[35] On October 1 he revealed his conviction about the historical inevitability of the development of Communism during a speech in Chicago before the Polish-American Congress. Kennedy said that the United States

> must show in West Berlin that we have no intention of yielding to Soviet claims, that we believe that history will yield in time a free and united Berlin and a free and united Europe. We must convince the Russians that we are rebuilding our defensive strength so that the route of military force can no longer be open to them.[36]

He thus revealed his belief that a determined image must be presented in Europe. During the October 7 televised debate with Richard Nixon, he once again predicted a Berlin crisis would come the following late winter or spring.[37] This prediction became more emphatic when he asked nine days later in Wilmington, Delaware: "can you possibly say that our power is increasing when you <u>know</u> that next winter and next spring the United States <u>will</u> face a most serious crisis over Berlin at a time

when our strength is not rising in relation to that of the Communists?" [emphasis added.][38] The only serious Berlin crisis that was imminent at that time was the one Kennedy was predicting and the one he would play a major part in creating eight months later.

Since Khrushchev's U-2 incident announcement on May 5, 1960, and the subsequent collapse of the Paris summit meeting, the Berlin issue had remained relatively low-key.[39] Sorensen indicated that Khrushchev revived it early the following year when he "vowed on January 6 to 'eradicate this splinter from the heart of Europe'."[40] By the beginning of 1961 Khrushchev had decided to settle the Berlin issue. He was concerned, or at least professed to be, that West Germany would soon acquire nuclear weapons, and the rising flow of refugees into West Berlin was creating a serious problem.[41]

In March, 1961 Kennedy asked former Secretary of State Dean Acheson for his opinions. The report Acheson presented at a meeting with British Prime Minister Macmillan and Foreign Secretary Lord Home during April was, as could be expected, hard-line. Acheson said that it appeared that the Soviets were planning to force the issue sometime during the year. To combat this he felt the Western allies needed to prepare to send a military division over the German Autobahn. This proposal skipped over the possibilities of diplomatic or economic measures. The British statesmen, with the concurrance of some of the Americans present including Adlai Stevenson, observed this fact and counseled for a diplomatic initiative from a united West. Acheson believed negotiations should be avoided because nothing could be gained from them.[42] Schlesinger described Kennedy's response as sitting "poker-faced, confining himself to questions about the adequacy of existing military plans and

saying that, if Khrushchev could be deterred only by fear or direct encounter, the allies must consider how to convince him that such an encounter would be sufficiently costly."[43] Thus it appeared that Kennedy heard the advice he wanted and chose to follow the course of a hard-line stance against Communism much the same as he had done in relation to Cuba and would do concerning Laos and Vietnam.

The advice Kennedy received from Acheson characterized his attitude about Berlin when he went to Vienna. The meeting with Khrushchev was not to be a negotiating forum on the Berlin issue. Therefore Kennedy approached it without new proposals on the problem or willingness to listen to those the Soviets offered. Instead he chose to maintain the objectives Acheson had outlined. As reported by Sorensen, these were: first, the freedom of West Berliners to select their own systems; second, the presence of Western troops as long as they were necessary and wanted; and third, unimpeded access along the Autobahn, air lines, and canals leading into the city.[44]

Kennedy approached the Vienna meeting with no intention of negotiating on Berlin. Despite his statement in Hyannis Port, Massachusetts, on July 28, 1960, that the next President "must negotiate over Berlin,"[45] Kennedy was neither ready nor willing to do so. This was to be the beginning of the Berlin crisis. Walton wrote that "while Khrushchev had reiterated his call for a peace conference and treaty, Kennedy was deciding to avoid talks."[46]

Khrushchev "almost casually" mentioned the need to discuss Berlin and a peace treaty at the conclusion of the first day of talks. The conversation which followed on the next day was the grimmest and most controversial of the meeting. Neither man was willing to compromise

in the least. Each revealed his suspicions and fears that the other wanted to use the issue as a means to threaten his opponent's national interests. In the tradition of the hard-line Cold Warriors, each stood firm before the other's attack.

Aftermath

The Vienna conference concluded with each man familiar with the attitudes of the other. Sorensen wrote that between Kennedy and Khrushchev, "despite the divergence of their views, a curious kind of rapport was established which was to help continue their dialogue in the months and years that followed."[47] Kennedy left the meeting discouraged by Khrushchev's attitudes that disarmament inspections were equivalent to espionage, West Germany was a potential source of danger, the United States supported colonialism, and the President was a tool of Wall Street. He feared that if Khrushchev had meant what he had said, particularly about Berlin, a nuclear war was highly possible. "For," according to Sorensen, "Kennedy had meant what he said."[48]

Khrushchev's cheerful public appearance following the talks contrasted with Kennedy's solemness. This added to the impression that the experience had been traumatic for the President and that Khrushchev had bullied him. Khrushchev had found Kennedy "tough," especially on the Berlin issue, and liked him personally for his frankness and sense of humor. Still, he thought Eisenhower had been more reasonable and co-operative up until the time of the U-2 incident. Both Kennedy and Khrushchev had left Vienna with a deep and lasting impression of his adversary. As Sorensen wrote, "each was unyielding on his natin's interests. Each had seen for himself, as a leader must, the nature of

his adversary and his arguments; and both realized more than ever the steadfastness of the other's stand and the difficulty of reaching agreement."[49]

Upon leaving Vienna, Kennedy flew to London where he spent a day talking informally with Macmillan. Evidently, major issues were not discussed in detail. Kennedy described his session with Khrushchev after which he and Macmillan agreed that Moscow would interpret any concession by the West to negotiations as an admission of weakness. Kennedy expressed his opinion that military preparations required acceleration to meet a number of possible Soviet moves. The President left London reassured and returned to tell the American people of the sober time he had spent in Vienna and to prepare them for the possibility of a nuclear war.[50]

Kennedy related his "unforgettable experience" to the public in a radio and television address on the evening of June 6.[51] The purpose of the trip, he said, included two policy objectives. These were "the unity of the free world, whose strength is the security of us all, and the eventual achievement of a lasting peace." The first of these, he felt, had received profound encouragement from his talks with de Gaulle. He reported that he "left Paris for Vienna with increased confidence in Western unity and strength." It was the latter aim which appeared to concern Kennedy more, about which he felt less confident, and about which he seemed less hopeful.

Kennedy believed it his duty to report candidly and publicly to the people, Congress, and allies about the "2 days we met in sober, intensive conversation." The talks had covered the views about the major issues separating the two powers. He added that, although the

session had been sober, "there was no discourtesy, no loss of tempers, no threats or ultimatums by either side; no advantage or concession was either gained or given; no major decision was either planned or taken; no spectacular progress was either achieved or pretended." What had been accomplished, he felt, was that each man had seized the opportunity to explain clearly his respective nation's views and to become familiar with those of the other. These views were different on the questions of right and wrong, internal affairs and external interference, and, most important, on the current and future status of Communism in the world.

After briefly discussing the conversations on Laos and disarmament, Kennedy turned to the "most somber talks . . . on the subject of Germany and Berlin." He clarified his opinion of the relationship of United States-Western European security and the nation's commitments to the people of Berlin. Then he outlined Khrushchev's views and rejected them. "We are not seeking to change the present situation. A binding German peace treaty is a metter for all who were at war with Germany, and we and our allies cannot abandon our obligations to the people of West Berlin." What Kennedy failed to make explicit was that he had no intention of altering the current balance of power or of revoking any commitment and thus appearing weak in the eyes of the world.

Khrushchev had spoken in terms of the eventual triumph of his nation's system on the basis of its superiority and not through wars. But this Communist plan, as Kennedy saw it, was to aid guerilla movements in the underdeveloped countries and thereby convert the rising populace to Communism. The method of overt invasions across international borders, such as the Korean experience, had been replaced by underground support

for subversion and wars of liberation. Kennedy's position was equally strong that it would be the ideals of "liberty and independence and self-determination" that would eventually triumph.

Kennedy then made a concession which, when the history of American involvement in Vietnam during the year is considered, was of major significance. He conceded that, as Khrushchev had said, not all disorders in the world were Communist inspired. "The Communists move in to exploit them, to infiltrate their leadership, to ride their crest to victory. But the Communists did not create the conditions which caused them." Here was another lesson that Kennedy failed to comprehend and remember. Instead of listening to his advisers who advocated measures designed to improve conditions in Vietnam, he chose to heed those proposing ways to intensify the fight against the local guerillas.

In concluding his address, Kennedy appealed for support for the foreign military and economic aid programs being considered by the Congress. "I do not justify this aid merely on the grounds of anti-Communism. It is a recognition of our opportunity and obligation to help these people be free, and we are not alone."

Possibly more than anything else, Kennedy wanted to avoid giving the impression that a new "Spirit of Camp David" had developed at Vienna. The Soviets had warned that a nuclear war was possible within the next six months. He wanted no one to believe that he would tolerate a complacent attitude and Congress to rally behind him ready to support his every move. Kennedy sought to make the United States the nation that he had claimed to represent at a birthday dinner in Boston on May 29, 1961, "the greatest revolutionary country on earth."[52]

Kennedy had been impressed with the Soviet determination to see

Communism dominate throughout the world. He had expressed his own desire to see the struggle between the East and the West remain economic and political. Finally, he had decided that America had to prepare for any sacrifices that the maintenance of the balance of power required. President de Gaulle and Premier Khrushchev both warned him against becoming enmeshed in local Third World conflicts. As will be seen, he soon neglected this advice. Kennedy's determination to present a strong image to the Soviet Communists had guided his actions at Vienna. He had expressed his unwillingness to accept any changes in the status quo and intimated that the policy of containment would be continued. He failed to comprehend the meaning of revolution against external influence in the Third World. These opinions caused Kennedy to guide the United States more toward the deepening quagmire in Southeast Asia during the remaining months of 1961.

CHAPTER IV

THE "MESS" IN LAOS

The most urgent crisis Kennedy faced in Southeast Asia was the deteriorating situation in Laos. As he told Khrushchev at Vienna, the United States' policy there had not always been correct. It had been developed on the basis of international alliances, according to the recommendations of John Foster Dulles. Eisenhower's Administration had attempted to create a bastion against Communism in Laos after the completion of the Geneva Accords in 1954. Despite the provision that Laos would be permitted to exist as a neutral state, Washington chose to support the rightist pro-Western faction instead of those Laotians who appeared to truly represent a course of genuine neutrality.

National and personal image played a vital role in the policies Kennedy implemented for Laos. During his campaign he pledged himself to a firm stand against the advancement of Communism around the world. Although the Laotian problem never achieved the magnitude of either the Berlin or the Cuban issue, Kennedy frequently referred to Laos as an example of Eisenhower's foreign policy failures and an area where Soviet and Communist influence was spreading. Departing from his approach to the Berlin and Cuban issues, he made no specific policy commitments on Laos, arguing that better American leadership could restrain Communism in Southeast Asia. His most specific criticism of Eisenhower's policies was that American aid to Laos since 1954 had been for military rather

than economic improvements. During the campaign Kennedy predicted that all Laos would soon fall to the Communists.[1] Laos presented the opportunity for him to show determination to use American military power to gain political objectives.

The Laotian policy Kennedy and his advisers developed was not built on the concept of containment as were those for Berlin and Cuba. Why was he willing to negotiate the future of Laos and to risk strengthening the Communist position there instead of pursuing a course intended to drive them out completely? Did he apply to Laos the lessons that he supposedly learned as he matured as President? Although they were anti-Communist, Kennedy's policies concerning Laos depended upon what appeared to be more realistic appraisals of the situation than other policies inaugurated in 1961.

Anti-Neutralist America

By the beginning of 1961, the conflict in Laos between anti-Communist and pro-Communist factions had intensified. This struggle was threatening to involve the interests of the major Eastern and Western powers on an increasing scale. "Up to the time of Khrushchev's renewed threat to Berlin in June 1961," Richard Stebbins wrote, "the disorder in this part of Asia loomed as the year's most serious danger to world peace as well as the gravest challenge to American interests outside the Western Hemisphere."[2]

The final declaration of the Geneva Accords contained a passage which read:

> In their relations with Cambodia, Laos, and Viet-Nam, each member of the Geneva Conference undertakes to respect the sovereignty, the independence, the unity, and the territorial integrity of the above mentioned states, and

to refrain from any interference in their internal affairs.[3] Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, classifying neutrality as "immoral," included Laos in SEATO by means of a Protocol to the 1954 treaty so that it would not fall to the Communists. During the next six years, Washington sent more than $300 million worth of aid to Laos. This amounted to about $150 per Laotian.[4]

Within three years after the signinf of the Geneva Accords, pro-Western Prince Souvanna Phouma had realized that his country would need a militarily neutral government in order to survive. Following exhaustive negotiations with several unstable factions and the Pathet Lao led by his half-brother, Prince Souphanouvong, Souvanna succeeded in establishing a coalition government. He then gained recognition for his government from Hanoi and Peking despite its pro-Western tendencies and established a neutralist pro-Western government in Laos in 1957. Interference by agencies of the United States Government soon destroyed this government.

Following national elections on May 3, 1958, Prime Minister Souvanna declared that the pledges of the Geneva Accords had been fulfilled. The International Control Commission /ICC/ created at Geneva was adjourned sine die on July 20 despite the disagreement of its Polish members and protests from Hanoi and Peking. Activity against Souvanna's government soon intensified. Much of this activity was waged by the CIA sponsored "Committee for the Defense of National Interests" /CDNI/. Officials in Washington also became increasingly concerned during this period. Former Ambassador to Laos J. Graham Parsons had been appointed Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs. While in Laos, he had struggled against the formation of a coalition government including representatives of the Communist Neo Lao Hak Xat /NLHX/ party. The NLHX

made significant gains in the National Assembly in the 1958 elections. Parsons then led a movement in Washington to withhold monthly aid payments to the Laotian Government on the pretexts of corruption in the commodity aid program and of need for monetary reforms. Opponents of Souvanna, with the CDNI in the forefront, took advantage of this to generate a parliamentary crisis. On July 23, Souvanna lost a vote of confidence in the National Assembly and resigned.[6]

After his resignation, Souvanna went to Paris as the Laotian Ambassador. In Laos the political pendulum began to swing. King Savang Vathana requested Prince Phoui Sananikone to form a new government based on pro-Western neutrality. Washington supported the new government and ended most of the abuses of the commodity aid program. The new government excluded the two Communist ministers who had been part of Souvanna's cabinet and included four members of the CDNI, none of whom had been prior members of the National Assembly. Washington officials generally viewed this as the best way to keep Laos out of the Communist camp without attempting to achieve the unattainable goal of making the country an ally and a bastion. Sananikone's policies required strict international neutrality while maintaining close ties with the West. He restricted the Communists from participation in the government and the military in Laos.[7]

By the end of 1959, Sananikone had decided to reorganize his government and remove the CDNI ministers. Among those removed was a favorite of the CIA, General Phoumi Nosavan. On December 31, Nosavan joined with other Laotian generals to lead a bloodless coup and overthrow the Sananikone government.[8] This coup was a good example of American interference in Laotian affairs at the time. Sananikone was an

anti-Communist who possessed too many independent ideas for the CIA's liking. Therefore he was replaced by forces more to the agency's preference.[9]

British, French, and other statesmen, fearful that the establishment of a military dictatorship would end the Geneva cease-fire, joined with Washington to exert pressure on the generals and the King to form a civilian government. A compromise resulted in the appointment of Kou Abhay as interim prime minister and the scheduling of elections for April 24, 1960.[10] The right-wing faction in Laos viewed these elections as an opportunity to consolidate their position in the government. Led by Nosavan, they rigged the elections, thus barring the Pathet Lao and neutralist candidates from winning any of the fifty-nine available National Assembly seats. Roger Hilsman reported that conditions were so controlled that the Pathet Lao candidates were even soundly defeated in their northern stronghold province of Sam Neua. The election results pleased Washington, which therefore supported the anti-Communist government formed by Nosavan and the CDNI with Tiao Somsanith as Prime Minister. On the other hand Prince Souphanouvong, who had been imprisoned in 1959, was displeased and escaped along with fourteen other prisoners and their guards on May 23. The situation in Laos appeared ready to erupt into a general civil war. Nosavan's government was confident of victory if this should occur. They placed most of their faith in a young French and American trained paratroop captain, Kong Le.[11]

In August, Le asked his advisers to conduct a tactical exercise in holding and defending a major city. He suggested the Laotian capital of Vientiane. Le's advisers were pleased with the request and consented. On August 9, Somsanith, Nosavan, and the entire cabinet went to the royal

capital at Luang Prabang for consultations with the King. The next day, Le led his Second Paratroop Battalion into Vientiane and within hours controlled the city. He went on radio to call for a halt to the civil war and the formation of a truly neutral government. Le was disturbed with the corruption in the government and the army which had resulted from the American aid program and with the abandonment of Souvanna and his neutrality. He also resented the predominance of foreigners in Laos. On the twelfth, he formed a Provisional Executive Committee including left-wingers and Souvanna and asked the King to reappoint Souvanna as prime minister.[12]

After the coup, Nosavan fled south to his stronghold at Savannakhet. Following a National Assembly vote ousting the pro-American government, Souvanna began rebuilding a neutralist coalition like the one wrecked by the United States in 1958. He flew to Savannakhet where he eventually convinced Nosavan to join the new government. In late August, the National Assembly meeting in Luang Prabang approved the new cabinet including Nosavan as Vice Premier and Minister of Interior. This government received the full support of the American Embassy and the recently appointed Ambassador, Winthrop Brown, who was convinced of Souvanna's neutrality. Washington did not share Brown's opinion, and the conservative element in the State Department began moves to reinstate Nosavan in the controlling position.[13]

Ambassador Brown recommended unqualified recognition of Souvanna's government. The CIA and the State Department complied with this, but at the same time continued their support of Nosavan. Le's coup had not diminished Nosavan's hopes of ruling Laos. He had his army intact at Savannakhet and was convinced that his American friends would help him

return to power. The action by the CIA and the State Department and the fact that CIA agent Jack Hazey remained with Nosavan reinforced this conviction. Souvanna told Brown that he did not object to the continued supply of Nosavan's forces as long as the equipment was not turned against him. Brown sent representatives to Savannakhet to persuade Nosavan to come to Vientiane for talks. Fearful of leaving his retreat, Nosavan refused.[14]

In early September, Brown received instructions from the State Department to seek a replacement for Souvanna. But he continued his support for the neutralist leader while the CIA, and the militarry advisers in the Program Evaluation Office [PEO] in Laos reverted to full support for Nosavan. On the tenth, Nosavan announced the creation of a counter-coup committee in opposition to Souvanna.[15] Meanwhile, Souvanna had found the Pathet Lao forces much stronger and more difficult to negotiate with than in 1957. It was also doubtful that he would be able to obtain recognition from Hanoi and Peking.[16]

Although Souvanna possessed most of Laos' aircraft, he lacked food and fuel. Tons of these items from the United States were being stockpiled in Bangkok, Thailand. One week following Nosavan's announcement, Marshal Sarit Thanarat of Thailand proclaimed a blockade against the Pathet Lao and the Laotian government. But supplies continued to flow into Nosavan's camp. Nosavan received supplies intended for delivery to Vientiane and 200 paratroops trained by the United States in Thailand despite a promise by Brown to Souvanna that this would not occur. This indicated that Sarit had at least tacit American support for his blockade. Washington claimed attempts were being made to releave the blockade, but the vice around Souvanna and his backers

tightened.[17] Despite Souvann's pleas, the United States did not pressure Sarit to stop the blockade. In great need of food and supplies, Souvanna turned to the Soviet Union for assistance. On October 1, he announced his approval of the establishment of a Soviet Embassy in Vientiane. To the conservatives in Washington, such as Parsons, this act confirmed their suspicions that Souvanna had been a Communist all along.[18]

Soon after Souvann's announcement, Secretary of State Christian Herter despatched a delegation headed by Parsons to talk with the Prime Minister. The mission was a disaster because Parsons had been instrumental in the destruction of Souvanna's previous coalition and the two men now despised each other. In effect, Parsons demanded that Souvanna abandon his neutral position and sever all relations with the Pathet Lao. Schlesinger wrote that when Souvanna refused to comply, officials at the State and the Defense Departments "agreed that Souvanna must go."[19] A high-level Pentagon group headed by Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Affairs John N. Irwin followed Parsons to Laos for talks with Nosavan.[20]

When Parsons left Laos, Ambassador Brown accompanied him to Bangkok where he convinced the Assistant Secretary to offer Souvanna a compromise. Upon returning to Laos, Brown told Souvanna that if the non-Communist factions continued their dispute, the Pathet Lao might take over the entire country. Brown assured the Prime Minister that American aid to his government would resume if he would permit the continued military supply of Nosavan's forces who would fight only against the Communists. Souvanna agreed to the proposal attempting to convince Washington once and for all that he was not as naive about the Communists as was

suspected.[21] About this same time the Soviet Ambassador arrived in Vientiane. Souvanna, in desperate need of supplies, accepted his offer of economic aid. Washington responded by renewing its financial support of both the government and Nosavan's forces.[22]

In November, Nosavan began his campaign to regain control of the government. With CIA encouragement he took the royal capital at Luang Prabang. From there he began a march toward Vientiane carrying plans drawn up by his American advisers. Early in December, Souvanna made a final plea to Brown for rice and oil. When this was refused, he turned to the Soviet Union for help. Moscow could resist this opportunity to gain political influence and replace Peking as the principal Communist influence in the region. On December 11, the Soviets began airlifting supplies from Hanoi in an operation that Deputy Foreign Minister Georgi M. Pushkin later described to Averell Harriman as being organized and executed on a priority higher than any other peacetime undertaking.[23] While Nosavan's forces approached Vientiane, Kong Le's troops prepared for an attack with recently acquired weapons from the Soviet Union.

Nosavan arrived at the capital on December 13 and began a bloody three day battle for the city. The same day the King named Prince Boun Oum to form a new government.[24] By December 18, Nosavan had succeeded in capturing Vientiane. Finding his position untenable, Souvanna exiled himself to Cambodia. Le moved north distributing approximately 10,000 American-made rifles to Pathet Lao forces along the way. Nosavan failed to pursue Le, choosing instead to remain in Vientiane for the establishment of the Boun Oum government. Upon arriving in the north, Le formed a de facto alliance with the Pathet Lao, and by early 1961 they had succeeded in taking the Plaines des Jarres in central Laos.

The Laotian National Assembly approved Boun Oum as Prime Minister and Nosavan as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense soon after the capital fell to the right-wing. The United States recognized this new government while the Communist nations continued to acknowledge Souvanna and increased the flow of supplies to Le and the Pathet Lao.[25]

On December 17, Washington blamed the Soviet airlift for creating the current crisis, as if the United States had not been sending military supplies to Laos. By January, 1961, Nosavan had received six AT-6 trainers equipped for combat and 400 Special Forces personnel assigned as "White Star Teams" to each of Nosavan's battalions.[27] As they were evaluated in the Pentagon Papers, these advisers "had the purpose and effect of establishing U.S. control over foreign forces."[28] However, Nosavan's forces continued their poor showing. The Boun Oum government, trying to explain this, falsely claimed that Laos had been invaded by North Vietnamese troops. The authors of the Pentagon Papers commented that "it turned out that the neutralist/Communist forces were far more effective than those favored by the U.S., and so it became clear that only by putting an American army into Laos could the pro-Western faction be kept in power."[29]

This was the situation as John Kennedy prepared to take office on January 20, 1961. The day prior to his inauguration Kennedy met with President Eisenhower and some of his top advisers. Clark Clifford prepared a memorandum for President Johnson on September 29, 1967, describing the conference.[30] Clifford reported that the problem of Laos was included as the first subject listed under the general topic of "state."

Eisenhower opened the conversation about Laos with a declaration

that Washington was determined to preserve Laotian independence. In his opinion, the Communists had definite intentions of taking over Southeast Asia. He felt it would be tragic if they succeeded in Laos because that would initiate a domino effect leading to the eventual Communization of the entire region. After briefly reviewing recent developments, Eisenhower stated that the Communist Chinese and the North Vietnamese were determined to destroy Laos' independence. To this he added the danger of the Soviet supply of the Pathet Lao. The President cited past experience to support the idea that it would be dangerous to admit the Communists into the government. This would result in an eventual takeover of control.

At this point, Clifford wrote, Secretary of State Herter inserted his opinion that SEATO was committed to act if the Laotian government requested aid under the pact. Eisenhower agreed confirming the binding nature of the American obligation and gave the Kennedy party the impression that such an appeal had already been received. Eisenhower noted that the British and the French were opposed to intervening and would probably maintain that stand. The President told Kennedy that a revival of the ICC was the second alternative for action. But he added that he felt certain the Soviets would oppose this and reiterated his preference for SEATO. Herter told the group that an agreement with the British was possible, although doubtful, if they could be persuaded to recognize the current Laotian government. The Secretary stated, with Eisenhower's approval, that they must continue to make every effort for a peaceful settlement. The option in case of failure was unilateral action by the United States. Eisenhower repeated the points he had made earlier and concluded that "it was imperative that Laos be defended. He

said that the United States should accept this task with out allies, if we could persuade them, and alone if we could not."[31] Unilateral action, as Eisenhower saw it, was the last desperate hope to be employed only if attempts to obtain allied co-operation failed.

Schlesinger reported that Kennedy had listened quietly to the explanation. He now commented on the go-it-alone alternative and asked how long it would take to get an American division into Laos. Secretary of Defense Thomas Gates answered between twelve and seventeen days unless troops already stationed in the Pacific were sent. He added that America's forces were in excellent shape and good progress was being made to modernize the army. Schlesinger wrote that the Secretary felt confident American forces were capable of handling a limited war but not two simultaneously.[32]

Kennedy commented on the seriousness of the situation and asked if a climax appeared to be approaching. Eisenhower told him that the entire situation was extremely confusing but that America's commitment to defend the Laotian government was clear. Among the reasons for defending Laos was that its collapse would endanger neighboring Thailand. According to Clifford's account it was agreed that Thailand was a valuable ally. Someone suggested that the United States should send military instructors to assume and improve the training of the Thai military from the French.

Eisenhower turned to the question of Communist activity in the area. He said that the Russians appeared to be concerned over the pressure being exerted by Hanoi and Peking. This, he felt, could result in difficulty between Peking and Moscow. Secretary Herter commented that the Soviets, while willing to push the crisis to the brink, did not want a war in Southeast Asia. He stated that Moscow had to be convinced that Washington

was prepared to defend Laos at any cost.[33] The discussion of the Laotian situation ended with Eisenhower commenting that the morale of the Communists was always better in this type of intervention than that of the democratic forces. His explanation was that the Communist philosophy appeared to inspire greater dedication than the democratic beliefs.

Thus Kennedy learned the details of the Laotian situation. The time had come for him and his advisers to assume the responsibility. During the eleven months that followed, the policy of the United States toward neutral nations and Laos in particular changed. During this same period, Kennedy sought to avoid a war but remained prepared to involve the United States in a ground war in Laos.

Intervention or Negotiation

When Kennedy took office, it seemed to him that only American troops would be able to stop the Pathet Lao advance. In essence, this was what Eisenhower and Gates had told him the day before when the outgoing President had apologized for the "mess" he was leaving.[34] Kennedy's dilemma was whether or not American troops should be sent to Laos and, if so, how many, where, and how? John Foster Dulles had correctly predicted that the assumption of a firm stand in Southeast Asia would become increasingly expensive. Whatever the decision, it would be felt around the globe. The Communists would be watching Kennedy for any sign of weakness. Irresolution on his part could mean forfeiture of influence in the area.[35] Kennedy was determined to present an image of strength and firmness. The policies he pursued regarding Laos were based largely on this determination.

The clear possibility that the Soviets might join with the Pathet Lao to unseat the Boun Oum government existed when Kennedy took office. During December Eisenhower had warned Moscow against such intervention and directed military maneuvers in the area to signal increased readiness to become more involved. Pathet Lao activities on the Plaines des Jarres had revealed the ineptness of the Laotian government forces, endangered Vientiane and the Mekong river valley, and strengthened the Pathet Lao in the panhandle along the Ho Chi Minh trails.[36]

Soon after taking office, Kennedy asked his top political advisers about the feasibility of continuing support for Nosavan and his military advisers for plans to save Laos. He called Ambassador Brown to Washington for a report on the situation.[37] Laos was the most pressing foreign problem Kennedy had to deal with, but for his Administration it was not the most important. Cuba aroused more public concern, and relations with the Soviet Union affected far more long-range hopes for peace and American interests in Europe. But it was Laos that required immediate tactical decisions. Generally, Laos was the concern of mid-echelon personnel in the various departments who followed guidelines sent down sporadically from the top. The Kennedy people accepted the analysis of Eisenhower's Administration that there was a Communist threat to Laos as evidenced by the Soviet airlift and the Pathet Lao gains in contrast to Nosavan's losses. During Eisenhower's final weeks in office, Kennedy had disassociated himself completely from the decisions made and Rusk declined the opportunity to participate in decision making.

Kennedy's first decision about Laos came shortly after he took office. On January 21, the British government sent a proposal to Moscow repeating an earlier call for a renewal of the ICC. The question of the

legitimate head of the Laotian government would be by-passed by accrediting the commission to King Vathana. The proposal had been prepared prior to January 20 and held for Kennedy's approval. When he endorsed it, he also initiated a total reappraisal of the nation's policy toward Laos.

On January 23, the new Administration's first foreign policy conference took place. The people who concentrated on the Laos question were the same ones that became deeply involved with Vietnam. At the same time, Kennedy's system of task forces became a formal part of his Administration with the creation of inter-agency, co-ordinating groups that would report directly to the President.[38] During Kennedy's first two months as President, more time and task force studies were dedicated to the Laotian question than to any other problem.[39] The Laotian task force consisted of Parsons and his Deputy John Steeves, Paul Nitze, Walt Rostow, representatives of the CIA and the JCS, and some lower level State Department people. This group recommended a hard line solution of the problem. In contrast, Kennedy seemed instinctively to favor a diplomatic rather than a military solution to the problem.[40] Kennedy gave evidence of this during his press conference on January 25. "The United States is using its influence to see if that independent country [Laos], peaceful country, uncommitted country, can be established under the present very difficult circumstances" [emphasis added].[41] This apparent reversal of the Eisenhower policy of seeking a pro-Western government encouraged the few American advocates of a neutral Laos, particularly those at the Embassy in Vientiane.[42]

American policy during early 1961 was planned along two alternatives -- either to find a peaceful diplomatic solution in Laos or to force a military settlement. President Kennedy appeared to prefer the former,

and the advocates of diplomacy therefore got the first opportunity to end the crisis. Among them was Under Secretary of State Chester Bowles. Bowles reported that the early conversations at the State Department proposed a resurrection of the 1957 Vientiane agreements that had created Souvanna's neutral coalition government. He argued that unless the Pathet Lao were prevented from forcefully taking over the entire country, a viable coalition was not possible. This led to a near consensus among State Department officials that Washington should intervene militarily if it became necessary to stop the Pathet Lao advance. Bowles argued that this plan ignored the fact that American intervention would preclude any possibility of ever establishing a neutral government. He stated that if Washington were serious about neutrality, then the strategy formed should preclude military involvement.[43]

In early February, Kennedy rejected a revival of the ICC and an international conference in favor of a mission by local Southeast Asian states. On February 19, King Vathana appealed to Burma, Cambodia, and Malaya for assistance. The proposal, prepared in Washington, was designed to appeal to as many people as possible. It included some of Souvanna's ideas, denounced no one, declared a continuation of friendship and a neutral policy, and called for the removal of foreign military bases from Laos.[44] The King invited the leaders of the three nations to study the current Boun Oum government and determine its legitimacy. Only Malaya revealed any readiness to participate. Both Prince Norodon Sihanouk of Cambodia and U Nu of Burma declined the offer which they felt had been extended only in an attempt to strengthen Boun Oum's position.

A sudden halt in the Soviet airlift made it appear that the Russians were willing to support Vathana's proposal. Rusk requested Russian

Ambassador Mikhail Menshikov to add his country's support to the proposal. On the surface the overture appeared as if it might be acceptable to Moscow. But Pathet Lao leaders denounced the invitation as an American conspiracy, and this criticism was repeated by both Moscow and Peking.[45] Also, as Sihanouk and Nu had surmised, acceptance of the offer would had strengthened Boun Oum. The Soviets still recognized Souvanna's government and considered Boun Oum's totally illegitimate.

During this period, Britain had been waiting for a Soviet reply to its proposal to revive the ICC.[46] The Soviet Union instead called for a new international conference similar to the Geneva talks of 1954. Washington and London, reluctant to enter into another propaganda arena, had reportedly snubbed earlier proposals by Sihanouk along this line. Meanwhile, Souvanna and Nosavan agreed that Laos should be neutral and supported the King's invitation despite the rejections it had already received. Rusk informed the British that Washington opposed a revival of the ICC as long as there was some hope that the problem could be settled by negotiations. Souvanna viewed Washington as the key to Laos' future and demanded some tangible evidence of support for a neutral government. Instead, Schlesinger wrote, Kennedy was prepared by the middle of March (when the Soviets resumed and intensified their airlift) to pledge added assistance to the Boun Oum government. He hoped this threat would cause the Russians to cease their supply operations.[47] According to Schlesinger, the crisis was becoming critical and the only alternative was for the United States to stiffen its position.[48]

Schlesinger's comment typified the view of the Kennedy Administration that a strong, unyielding policy provided the only means to achieve its objectives. In March, this attitude guided all of Kennedy's moves

and the advice he received on Laos. It was during March that the second policy track, military intervention, began to receive more favorable consideration from Kennedy and his top aides.

In 1961, no high level United States official was willing to have the nation passively watch the Communists take over Laos. But there was strong disagreement about the desirability of military intervention. Even the JCS, although agreeing that a show of force including the supply of Nosavan's forces was called for, believed the United States should intervene only to prevent the ultimate fall of Laos to the Communists and then without restrictions on the weapons to be employed. In late January, with the Pentagon optimistic about Nosavan's success, General Lemnitzer briefed a NSC meeting on an upcoming offensive to drive the Pathet Lao away from route 13 between Luang Prabang and Pakse deep into the Plaine des Jarres.[49]

A few weeks later Lemnitzer reported to the NSC on the progress of Nosavan's offensive. The news that the advance had covered only twenty miles weakened the Pentagon's optimism as well as the position of those favoring military action.[50] Schlesinger reported that Kennedy had been assured by the military experts that Nosavan would quickly take the Plaine des Jarres. The fact that this did not occur confirmed Kennedy's skepticism about Nosavan's ability and brought him to favor a coalition government such as Eisenhower's State Department had vetoed.[51] During February, Kennedy preferred to explore diplomatic channels to a settlement although military plans continued to be made and discussed.

On February 8, a long session of the NSC was held during which Laos was discussed. The problem of the nation's image played a major role during this meeting. Many of the newcomers to the government wanted to

appear weak although they were skeptical about the proposed military moves.[52] The situation at that time did not appear critical. Kennedy deferred making a military decision until learning the results of Nosavan's offensive and the British proposals. This would allow the Laos task force more time to prepare its report and provide an opportunity to attempt four diplomatic initiatives. The first of these was the King's appeal discussed above. Second was a request to SEATO for diplomatic and material, but not troop, support. The third effort was to refer the problem to the United Nations for action. Finally, Kennedy wanted steps taken to arrange an international conference on condition that, prior to its convening, a cease-fire be negotiated and the flow of Communist supplies be stopped.

This strategy contained two significant implications. First, it would require the recognition and thus the bolstering of the Boun Oum government. This was the stumbling block for SEATO's three neutral Asian and European members and the United Nations. Second, it was the first formalization of American willingness to participate in an international conference on Laos. The cease-fire was an integral part of Washington's position. The Administration wanted to avoid a conference that would be subject to changing military conditions. Furthermore a cease-fire would provide the opportunity to improve Nosavan's forces because, although the cessation of Soviet supplies was demanded, because, as Charles Stevenson, "the United States had no intention of ceasing its own supplies to Phoumi's forces."[53]

Washington officieals became impatient with the lack of progress on the diplomatic front and with Nosavan's inability to gain victory. The time for decisive action in Laos was approaching. Those officials in

Washington who distrusted Souvanna labeled his recent visit to a Pathet Lao camp at Phongsavan as proof that he was a Communist.[54] This opinion was supported by a New York Times article on March 3, 1961. James Wilde reported that

> the so-called neutralist government set up in the name of Prince Souvanna Phouma in Xiengkhouang Province in January in opposition to the Right-Wing Government of Prince Boun Oum in Vientiane appears to be a front for a powerfully backed group of Laotian Communists intent on taking over the entire country either by war or by political maneuvering.[55]

Washington began to indicate the situation was under reconsideration and that a climax of some kind was nearing.

Kennedy expressed his determination not to abandon Laos in messages he sent to Peking, Khrushchev, and Indian Prime Minister Nehru. He also revealed his readiness to accept a guarantee of a truly neutral Laos.[56] The most important part of the notes was a repetition of demands for a cease-fire and the cessation of the Soviet airlift. Kennedy was ready to talk but only from a position of strength when the negotiations could prove profitable to the United States.

In March, with the atmosphere of crisis and imminent defeat of Nosavan's forces becoming gloomier, the Administration leaned increasingly toward military intervention. The Soviet airlift and the number of Pathet Lao victories were capturing headlines in major American newspapers. By the middle of March, most of the officials in the Defense and the State Departments considered the situation too serious for a non-military course of action. Among those opposed to this view were Harriman and Bowles. Publicly, Kennedy remained noncommittal. Bowles argued that the deployment of American ground troops to the area could

conceivably result in a major war with China. The JCS responded that if this happened and the troops were in danger of being beaten, nuclear weapons would be used. The threat of a Chinese reaction was brushed aside during a mid-March White House meeting on the grounds that it probably would not happen and, if it did, military measures to combat it were available. Bowles assumed these measures to be nuclear weapons.[57]

During the first half of March, Nosavan's troops were driven back from their one forward position. Sorensen reported that Kennedy had four alternatives. His first choice, to do nothing and allow the Pathet Lao to take over the entire country, was unacceptable. This would shake the confidence of other allies and lead to a more costly involvement elsewhere. The second option was the course inherited from Eisenhower of providing the pro-Western faction with the support required for survival. Kennedy viewed this course as contrary to common sense and the wishes of the nation's major allies. He believed it was not possible to establish a bastion when the people did not want it and that efforts to do so would commit the country to prolonged support of an unpopular government. His third choice was to accept a division of Laos like those of Vietnam and Korea where the difficulties of protecting a long frontier without American troops had already been demonstrated. This would provoke accusations that the area had been turned over to the Communists and place the royal palace at Luang Prabang, which the King would never leave, in the Communist sector. The last alternative, and the course finally selected, was to seek negotiations to restore a neutral government in Laos. This selection meant the United States would have to sit at the negotiating table with Communist China, abandon the previous policy of tying itself to a right-wing government, support

previously rejected Souvanna Phouma, withdraw its military mission, and accept a government that included Communists.[58]

Although he decided to pursue a diplomatic settlement, Kennedy remained adamant that Laos should not be allowed to fall to the Communists. On March 28, Secretary Rusk tried to convince an unyielding Soviet Foreign Minister, Andrei Gromyko, that Washington viewed the Laotian crisis as serious and was determined to prevent a Communist takeover.[59] Kennedy was determined that a cease-fire be established prior to the opening of negotiations. The alternative to this would be American intervention to save Laos. Preparations for military intervention included the development of a seventeen-step plan to alter the military activity of American personnel gradually from an advisory to an active combat role. Kennedy ordered Marines in Japan and on Okinawa to prepare to move to the Thai border along the Mekong valley, alerted the Seventh Fleet, and briefed Congressional leaders about his actions. Sorensen reported that after word about these preparations had leaked to the press, Kennedy felt it was good that the Communists knew about them.[60] The President was attempting to persuade the Communists to negotiate from fear of threatened American military action.

The NSC discussed the Laotian situation on March 20 and 21 without reaching a recommendation for future action. Schlesinger wrote that during lunch on the twentieth Kennedy told him and Walter Lippmann that he felt the United States was overcommitted in Laos but that he had to deal with the facts as they were. Schlesinger added that Kennedy felt "it was indispensible to prevent 'an immediate communist takeover.' We must hold Vientiane in order to have a basis for negotiation. 'We cannot and will not accept any visible humiliation over Laos'."[61]

[emphasis added] Kennedy thereby admitted that the question of image was of primary concern when he made foreign policy decisions.

Charle Stevenson believed that after the March 20 and 21 NSC meetings, "the issue now seemed to be a test of wills with the Soviet Union in which the new administration dared not flinch from its opposition to Communist advances in Laos."[62] During the sessions Kennedy and his advisers concluded that Russia could stop the trouble by ending its airlift. Walt Rostow argued for the deployment of American troops along the Mekong in Thailand ready to cross into Laos if required. The JCS countered this, predicting that it would provoke a massive retaliation from North Vietnam and that the President needed to send 60,000 men and be prepared to back them even to the point of nuclear war with China. This recommendation required the reduction of troop levels elsewhere. This fact, combined with the lack of urgency felt at the time, made it likely that Kennedy would reject intervention. Kennedy was becoming more strongly opposed to military action in support of Nosavan's forces. He was also receiving little indication of congressional interest in intervention and some warnings against such action from his senior advisers. McNamara wanted to formulate an over-all plan instead of making daily decisions, and Rusk viewed the situation as perplexing.[63]

Kennedy explained the "difficult and potentially dangerous problem" of Laos at a climatic televised press conference on March 23.[64] White House aid McGeorge Bundy and Soviet expert Charles Bohlen were primarily responsible for drafting Kennedy's statement on Laos. Kennedy felt their proposal was excessively belligerent and would not coincide with the image he wished to project. Although he was willing to threaten

action, his March 23 statement indicated that he preferred a diplomatic solution.[65]

Kennedy began his statement by briefly reviewing the events since 1954. The period had started with the emergence of Laos from the Geneva Conference 'free of domination from anyone." Progress was made during the first years toward a unified and neutral state. "But," according to Kennedy, "the efforts of a Communist-dominated group to destroy this neutrality had never ceased."[66] He blamed the Communists for creating the crisis in Laos without mentioning the activity of the United States and especially the CIA.

Kennedy then dramatically referred to three maps prepared for the press conference to show the advance of Communist activity in Laos. The first map indicated the area of Communist control in August 1960 as being essentially the two northeastern most provinces. By December 1960, as indicated in the second map, they had expanded into central Laos and the Plaine des Jarres. The final map indicated that as of the end of March 1961 the Communists controlled a much larger area along the mountains and hills in eastern Laos.[67] Kennedy noted that Soviet aid had been instrumental during this advance. The clear objective of this action, he said, was to destroy "by military action the agreed neutrality of Laos. It is this new dimension of externally supported warfare that creates the present grave problem."[68]

After this accusation Kennedy presented his position. He made three points about his policy. First, he claimed the United States favored an independent and neutral Laos. Next, he stated that a continuation of the hostilities would require Washington and the SEATO alliance to reconsider their obligations toward Laos. Finally, he expressed

willingness to negotiate the issue in order to "help Laos back to the pathway of independence and genuine neutrality." He concluded his statement with his desire "to make it clear to the American people and to all of the world that all we want in Laos is peace, not war; a truly neutral government, not a cold war pawn; a settlement concluded at the conference table and not on the battlefield."[69]

Kennedy's statement and the answers he gave to subsequent questions contained a number of significant points. First, as Sorensen pointed out, Kennedy had not intended to prepare the American people for an imminent invasion of Laos. His purpose had been to make clear his position on the need for a cease-fire prior to the beginning of negotiations and support for a neutral Laos.[70] He set no time limit for the end of the fighting or the opening of talks.[71] Kennedy's statement was an attempt to enlist American support for his policies and to notify the Soviet Union of an honorable retreat route through supporting the British proposal for a joint Soviet-British appeal for a cease-fire, revival of the ICC, and an international conference.[72]

But the major importance of Kennedy's statement was far more serious than these points. A Newsweek writer reported that "Mr. Kennedy's warning had been shaped with infinite care. There was no rhetoric, there were no empty threats, there was no irrelevance. The implication was clear: the U.S. was ready to use force if the Soviets refused to negotiate an agreement on an independent Laos."[73] Roger Hilsman stated it more simply and accurately when he wrote "the implication was war."[74]

Up until the time of Kennedy's press conference, Washington's Laotian policy had been inconsistent. Now it was publicly defined. Kennedy committed himself to seek a negotiated settlement of the problem.

More important, he abandoned the policy of supporting only a pro-Western government. Kennedy asserted that, "if in the past there has been any possible ground for misunderstanding of our desire for a truly neutral Laos, there should ne none now."[75] The diplomatic track was now open before the United States. But one must recall that while Kennedy offered to work for a peaceful settlement, he also threatened to intervene with military force.

The Diplomatic Effort

On March 26, Kennedy met with Prime Minister Macmillan in Key West, Florida. Macmillan argued against military intervention in Laos but finally reluctantly agreed to support Washington's position diplomatically and with troops if necessary. The next day Kennedy met with Foreign Minister Gromyko. Pravda heralded the meeting as an indication that Moscow was ready to accept the British proposals to end the fighting under certain conditions. These were that the United States and SEATO be warned against efforts to expand their activities in Laos and that Washington commit itself to attend a conference following a cease-fire. During the meeting Kennedy repeated and emphasized the points he had made on the twenty-third. He stressed the danger of a possible war if a miscalculation were made and therefore clarified his determination to keep Laos from falling to the Communists. Gromyko reacted with what seemed to be increased seriousness about reaching a settlement. Kennedy therefore left the meeting with confidence and hope.[76]

Secretary Rusk attended the Seventh Annual SEATO conference at Bangko during the final days of March. His purpose was to obtain support from the alliance for Washington's policies. He hoped to be able to

persuade SEATO to declare itself ready to use force if diplomatic steps failed. But Rusk was unable to fulfill his hopes. The British continued to concur only reluctantly, and the French remained adamantly opposed to any type of military course, the communique issued from Bangkok on March 30 revealed. After expressing hope that the current negotiation efforts would result in an "unaligned and independent Laos," the communiqué said that:

> If those efforts fail, however, and there continues to be an active military attempt to obtain control of Laos, members of SEATO are prepared, within the terms of the treaty, to take whatever action may be appropriate in the circumstances.[77]

Thus Rusk was able to gain a vague commitment to "appropriate" but not to military action from SEATO.

On April 1, the Soviets announced their acceptance in principle of the British proposal to end the Laotian conflict. The announcement expressed Russia's intent to call for an international conference in Cambodia to convene as soon as possible and suggested that a joint appeal for a cease-fire be issued by Britain and the Soviet Union. Kennedy was gratified with the declaration but foresaw difficult protracted talks. Several differences existed between the Soviet and the American positions. For example, the Russian announcement explicitly reaffirmed Soviet support for Souvanna Phouma. Washington still recognized the Boun Oum government. The paramount issue was Washington's insistence on a cease-fire before any international conference could begin. On April 16, the Soviets agreed to this condition. Six weeks after the Soviet announcement of April 1, a fourteen-nation international conference convened at Geneva.[78]

During April, the pendulum in Washington continued to swing between

a military and a diplomatic course. The question of United States firmness and Kennedy's resolve came to the fore after the Bay of Pigs. Laos served as Kennedy's example that the nation was ready for war and that he was not weak. By the middle of April, the Pathet Lao and the neutralist factions controlled approximately 70 per cent of Laos' territory and nearly 50 per cent of the population.[79] Officials in Washington began to worry that a cease-fire would not be arranged before Laos fell completely. On May 8, Newsweek concluded that a Communist victory in Laos could mean a major defeat for Kennedy's policy in Asia of shifting away from Eisenhower's anti-neutralist course.[80]

Prince Souvanna Phouma had begun a world tour during March to seek support for his neutralist faction and a peaceful settlement of the Laotian problem. Late in March, Ambassador Harriman arranged to meet him in New Delhi. Their talks were friendly, and Souvanna convinced Harriman that most Laotians did not want to be Communists. He felt his country could be saved but that time was becoming short. Souvanna proposed that a coalition government including representatives of the Pathet Lao be formed and that the nation's neutrality be guaranteed by a fourteen-nation conference. Harriman reacted favorably to Souvanna and agreed with the opinion of Ambassador Brown rather than with the State Department's evaluation of Souvanna as a Communist. Kennedy was pleased with Harriman's opinion and decided that Souvanna deserved reconsideration. Therefore the Prince was encouraged to add Washington to his tour itinerary for April 19 and 20.[81]

Souvanna planned to meet with Secretary Rusk but it was doubtful that such a session would have resulted in any progress. Rusk continued to favor the pro-Western government of Boun Oum and revealed this

attitude during a press conference on April 17. After stating that the United States had indicated a willingness to talk with Souvanna the Secretary added that "he comes here, of course, as a private citizen, not as an alleged official of the Laotian Government."[82] Rusk continued to reveal his reluctance to meet Souvanna by refusing to cancel a speaking engagement in Georgia scheduled for the time when the Prince was to be in Washington. Schlesinger ironically concluded correctly that "snubbed again, as he thought, Souvanna returned to Moscow."[83]

The Bay of Pigs incident and Kennedy's subsequent actions dispelled any false impressions about his character. Kennedy feared that the Soviets and the American voters might judge his failure to commit Americans to save the expedition as weakness. To demonstrate that his restraint was not irresolution, he converted the PEO in Laos to a Military Assistance Advisory Group [MAAG], ordering American advisers to wear military uniforms, and sanctioned a substantial broadening of their area of operations.[84] Kennedy met with former Vice President Nixon on April 20. Nixon recommended that the President take affirmative action in Laos, including the commitment of air power if necessary. Kennedy was reluctant to intervene in Laos where a fight with China might develop. He did not believe that he could justify any action against the Communists 5,000 miles away if he was unwilling to do so in Cuba only 90 miles from the United States.[85]

In contrast to Nixon's recommendation for affirmative action, Kennedy received advice to avoid sending troops to Asia. One of the most notable advocates of this position was General Douglas MacArthur. Sorensen reported that MacArthur warned Kennedy during an April meeting against committing ground troops in Asia. Sorensen claimed that "the

President never forgot this advice."[86] This observation proved incorrect in view of the troop increases Kennedy made in Vietnam late in 1961 and in the following months.

The Geneva Conference

On April 21, Moscow and London agreed on the technicalities of a cease-fire to be called three days later. They agreed to reactivate the ICC and extend invitations to a fourteen-nation conference on Laos. Schlesinger surmised that the Russians "were perhaps impressed by the introduction of MAAG and undoubtedly swayed by the intervention of Nehru." On April 25, the Souvanna and the Souphanouvong factions appeared willing to end the fighting and work toward a peaceful settlement. But the fighting continued, as indicated by a report to Washington on April 26, noted by Charles Markmann and Mark Sherwin, that the Pathet Lao were "attacking in force, as if to overrun the country before the cease-fire could take effect."[87]

The NSC discussed the Laotian situation on April 27. Walt Rostow, representing the Laotian task force, recommended a limited troop commitment to the Mekong region in Thailand. Harriman, although he was on an inspection tour of Laos at the time, reportedly supported this proposal. He felt it would add credence to his bargaining position when the conference opened. The JCS objected to the proposal. They declined to guarantee military success with the limited 60,000 troop and weapons recommendations made the previous month. Due to the varied positions of the JCS, Vice President Lyndon Johnson proposed that they each submit their opinions in writing. Kennedy accepted this recommendation and left to meet with Congressional leaders whom he found clearly

opposed to further military intervention.[88]

The JCS and the service secretaries presented eight position papers when the NSC reconvened on April 29. At Kennedy's request, McNamara directed the Chiefs and the secretaries to a compromise. They recommended that any immediate action be postponed, the Commander in Chief, Pacific, /CINCPAC/ be alerted to prepare for air strikes against North Vietnam and southern China, and that a 5,000-man combat brigade be sent to northeast Thailand and Danang, South Vietnam. They cautioned against military action within Laos. The divergent opinions added to the skepticism about the JCS that Kennedy had felt following the Bay of Pigs. He therefore placed the emphasis on diplomacy instead of on efforts for a military solution. However, Kennedy did not completely rule out military intervention. While vetoing the escalation of involvement against the Pathet Lao, Kennedy approved covert operations against the North Vietnamese in Laos and in North Vietnam. According to Stevenson, "the President and his advisers felt that they had to stand firm and draw the line in South Vietnam if they were going to back away from the brink of war in Laos."[89] Once again the concept of image was a major concern for the Administration. Vice President Johnson went to Southeast Asia in May to reassure "Asian leaders that despite Laos, the United States could be counted on to support them."[90]

Kennedy still considered sending troops to Laos on May 1 when the warring factions there negotiated a cease-fire. The armistice began on May 3 and received de facto recognition from the revived ICC on May 11. A fourteen-nation conference convened at Geneva on May 16.[91] Kennedy's admirers have described the Soviet agreement to seek a diplomatic settlement and the opening of the conference as a victory for the President's

policies. For example, Schlesinger has written that during the crisis Kennedy made military preparations and allowed the Russians to know of them. At the same time, he also made it clear that an honorable alternative was available. According to Schlesinger, "the outcome was to halt the imminent communization of Laos."[92]

The Soviet Union, China, and North Vietnam probably all envisioned a Communist Laos. The Soviets wanted this achieved without risking a general war. They were more interested in developments elsewhere, especially in Berlin, than in Laos. Thus despite the delays they wanted a political settlement which would enable them to work within a neutral Laos for an eventual takeover. The Chinese also wanted to avoid war. But they appeared to believe they could take greater risks before the United States would actually be provoked to action than the Soviets did. The North Vietnamese appeared to be the most impatient of the three. However Hanoi's actions were modified by an overriding desire to reunite Vietnam under Communist leadership. At the same time, the North Vietnamese wanted to avoid a repetition of North Korea's subordination to Peking. They needed help from both of the Communist giants and were therefore in a position to balance them against each other. Believing that the Soviets held the key to the future of Southeast Asia, Kennedy wanted to convince Moscow that the alternatives to talks and a neutral Laos were dangerous to their national interests.[93]

Kennedy's March 23 press conference, the establishment of the MAAG in Laos, and preparations to send additional forces to Thailand undoubtedly contributed to Khrushchev's caution toward further activity in Laos and the easing of tension. But as even Sorensen suggested a military solution in Laos was not in Russia's best interests considering

the risks.[94] Moscow undoubtedly was aware of this fact.

Definite reasons for Washington's acceptance of the cease-fire and the international conference were as obscure and confusing as the Kremlin's motives. Walton concluded that "whatever Kennedy's motives and however his diplomatic and military moves had contributed to that end, the President had moved a significant step away from the Eisenhower Administration's discredited and wholly unsuccessful attempts to make the pacific and remote Laotian soldiers in the anti-communist crusade."[95]

The Laotian situation came to a climax in early May, 1961. For the remainder of Kennedy's time in office Laos remained a background issue. On May 17, Secretary Rusk in Geneva reiterated the American belief that a viable cease-fire was essential for the success of the conference. He expressed the United States position that one problem to pease in Southeast Asia

> is whether those who have wrapped around themselves the doctrine of the historical inevitability of world domination by their own particular political system merely believe it or will attempt to impose it upon others by all the means, or whether it means an all-out and continuous struggle against all those not under Communist control.[96]

American attendance at the Geneva Conference resulted from a major policy change by Washington. Prior to 1961, the policy was to support the Royal Laotian Government in its anti-Pathet Lao efforts on Western terms, to approve the Laotian refusal of a revived ICC, and to reject Soviet demands for increased use of the machinery set up at Geneva in 1954. By May, 1961, the United States was forced to accept a conference that, although embarassing, presented the only hope of preventing the total collapse of Laos to the Communists.[97]

Rusk explained America's goal at Geneva as developing a "genuinely" neutral Laos including the positive elements of nationalism and safeguards against subversion. Convinced that a Communist-controlled government was incapable of being neutral, the United States sought "political neutrality" in Laos to prevent a seizure of power by the Pathet Lao.[98] Averell Harriman headed the American delegation to Geneva. Schlesinger wrote that "Kennedy reportedly told Harriman most emphatically not to come back without a settlement."[99] Following the start of the conference the American policy switched completely to the diplomatic track. The senior policy makers paid little attention to Laos, turning to other problems after Kennedy's meeting with Khrushchev in Vienna. Harriman took complete charge and shaped the American position.[100] The ambassador was the "chief architect" of the settlement as far as Washington was concerned.[101] However, it must be remembered that behind Harriman's diplomatic efforts was the ever-present threat to use force. Sorensen concluded that the tragedy of Laos was the divergence of money and effort away from the country's economic problems.[102] The actual casualty in Laos was caused by Kennedy's inability to understand the real needs and desires of the Laotians to rid themselves of foreign influence and his lack of understanding of the Soviet Communist policies. Kennedy relinquished America's position in Laos and retreated to neighboring Vietnam where a higher price would be paid. He had failed to learn the real lessons of the Bay of Pigs, Vienna, and Laos. Kennedy did not realize that the United States did not possess the power required to maintain its position in every country around the world and thus prevent changes in the balance of power. With this inflated viewpoint in American strength,

Kennedy began to create a commitment to South Vietnam which would be of incalculable cost.

CHAPTER V

JOHN KENNEDY'S COMMITMENT TO VIETNAM

The deteriorating situation in Laos was the most pressing issue in Southeast Asia that Kennedy inherited from Eisenhower. During the next three years, however, the emphasis and the priorities shifted to neighboring Vietnam. Kennedy extended Eisenhower's policies and made a commitment which led to President Johnson's escalation of the Vietnam war soon after he took office.

American involvement in Vietnam did not begin during the Kennedy years. It extended from the end of World War II and France's effort to regain her colonies. Since that time four basic steps led to America's extensive commitment. The first came when President Truman rejected Franklin Roosevelt's plan for an independent Indochina and aided France in her struggle there. Second, Eisenhower attempted through military and economic support to create an anti-Communist bastion. Third, President Kennedy increased the number of advisers and added combat personnel. Finally, Johnson extended the war and eventually deployed a force in excess of 500,000 men.[1]

During 1961 Kennedy attempted to keep all options in Vietnam open. Yet, by the year's end, a commitment to the Republic of Vietnam [RVN] seemed to be solidly established and troops had been dispatched to support that obligation. The Vietnam policy that the Kennedy Administration formulated during 1961 revealed the true nature of the President's view

of the world and the extent to which he relied on his closest advisers for assistance. It also indicated that Kennedy did not learn the lessons which his admirers claimed he had the capacity to absorb. Kennedy did not heed the advice of de Gaulle and Khrushchev to avoid sending combat units into Southeast Asia. Instead of accepting political recommendations as he had done prior to the Bay of Pigs, he sought those who offered military solutions to the problem. Unlike his decision to negotiate the future of Laos, he chose to continue support of the pro-United States Government of President Ngo Dinh Diem. Finally, he forgot the advice he had offered himself in 1953 that the country should not support unpopular governments.

What was Kennedy's commitment to Vietnam during 1961? Did it originate in the concern for image which played such an important role in other areas of policy? What were the concepts of Kennedy's senior advisers and to what extent did these men influence the President? Finally, did the course Washington pursued in 1961 actually coincide with what General Maxwell Taylor states was the objective in Vietnam--to insure the independence of South Vietnam, free from the threat of overt aggression from the North?

Background to the Commitment

In 1949, after four years of fighting against native insurgents in Indochina, the French appointed Bao Dai as Chief of State in Vietnam. From then until the final confrontation at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, Ho Chi Minh continued to direct the Viet Minh in their struggle for independence. Shortly before the Geneva Conference of 1954 convened, Bao Dai asked Ngo Dinh Diem to form a new government.

The war in Vietnam had created a state of political and economic chaos. Determined to rectify this situation, Diem gained control of the military in 1954. In 1955, he took over the police and the autonomous armed forces of the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai religious sects. After an October 1955 referendum, Diem replaced Bao Dai as Chief of State and on October 26 was proclaimed President of the RVN.[2] The following year a constituent assembly was elected and a constitution promulgated thus giving the appearance that some political stability had been achieved.

The United States has supplied aid to South Vietnam since 1950. After 1954 the MAAG became the only outside source of military aid for Saigon. This activity blended well into the framework of policy Eisenhower outlined on November 1, 1954. He stated that America intended to support a strong viable government in Saigon capable of resisting subversion or aggression. Eisenhower restated America's interest in 1959 when he expressed doubt that the RVN alone possessed the capabilities to produce and maintain the military and other agencies required for survival. He considered the loss of South Vietnam as the first link of the domino theory.

Kennedy revealed an interest in American-Vietnamese relations while he was in the Senate. He visited Indochina in 1951 and observed that the United States was supporting an unpopular colonial power. He called for the support of independence and self-determination for Indochina as the only practical means of building a nation capable of withstanding Communism. In 1953 he proposed an amendment to the Mutual Security Act which would require that aid be given through any available means to encourage the freedom and the independence of the people in Indochina.

Included was a concept for intensifying military strength. "The war would never be successful . . . unless large numbers of the people of Vietnam were won over from their sullen neutrality and open hostility," Kennedy said. "This could never be done . . . unless they were assured beyond doubt that complete independence would be theirs at the end of the war."[3] An Administration promise to work for Indochina's independence caused the amendments defeat.

The concessions France made were too little and came too late as the military threat intensified. Believing that all of Southeast Asia might fall after the siege of Dien Bien Phu, Eisenhower's Administration began to consider direct intervention. The Soviet Union and China also indicated that they would involve themselves more deeply. The risk of a general war would have therefore accompanied American troops into Vietnam in 1954. Kennedy fully agreed with the decision not to intervene. He realized that the lack of popular support doomed any colonial government struggling against a nationalist movement whether it was Communist inspired or not.

The stipulation that nationwide elections would be held in Vietnam in 1956 was included in the 1954 Geneva Accords. Diem refused to permit those elections. On the pretext that his government had not signed the Agreements, he declared that they were in contempt of Vietnamese interests. Furthermore, he believed that the police state methods practiced in the North would guarantee a Communist victory. Diem's actions received Washington's support. Claude Julien believes "it was to resist Communism that the United States first supported Diem's dictatorship in Saigon."[4] Thus containment extended to Southeast Asia and aid began flowing into Saigon under what was to become one of the

largest assistance programs in the free world.

After the Geneva Conference, Viet Minh activity reached a virtual standstill. Many who had been active in the South fled north leaving behind caches of arms and well trained cadres. Before long they began returning to join in the struggle against Diem's increasingly repressive regime. Between 1954 and 1959 their activities gradually intensified. This early struggle was waged without active support from Hanoi. Most of the men coming from the North were the members of the Viet Minh who had previously left the area, and the majority of their weapons had been captured from the French or South Vietnam's American supplied forces.

By December, 1960, Diem's repression had cost him much support among the people and had driven many opponents to the Communist camp. The Communist leaders in the South and the North believed the situation warranted a strong overt action against the Government of Vietnam [FVN]. They felt that a sufficient covert organization existed and that Diem's position could be seriously weakened. In 1959 and 1960 the number of assassinations and attacks on local officials increased from 1,700 to 4,000 and the insurgent operations assumed a more military complexion.[5]

In September, 1960, the Third Congress of the Communist Party of the DRV took cognizance of the rebellion in the South calling for a united effort against Diem and the expulsion of American imperialism from Vietnam.[6] Finally, in December the National Liberation Front [NLF] was established as the political arm of the insurgents. The coalition was built upon a large base including elements of the Viet Minh and a variety of nationalist and religious groups. Among their many goals was the reunification of North and South Vietnam.

The Communist buildup during the late 1950's went virtually

unnoticed. The major exception to this was its recognition by Diem and, more important, his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu. When the revolt assumed full-scale proportions in 1960 Diem labeled the rebels Vietnamese Communists /VC/ although many non-Communists and former Diem supporters were among them. He claimed concern for the problem but took few steps to deal with it effectively.

Nhu initiated an agroville project based upon the advice of foreign representatives, particularly that of Sir Robert Thompson, the head of the British Mission who had created a similar program successfully in Malaya. The basic concept of the plan was to provide sanctuaries of safety for the peasants. Nhu pushed the project too hard and too fast, and the hamlets were often deemed completed when the fortifications were finished. This meant that few of the needed social, economic, and political improvements were made.[7]

Between 1955 and 1961, non-military aid from the United States to the RVN totaled about $1.1 million for a variety of programs. Direct military assistance was in the form of weapons, equipment, and training for the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces /RVNAF/.[8] American troops did not become involved in the actual fight against the Communist forces during this period. According to Ambassador Elbridge Durbrow, there was widespread dissatisfaction with the GVN and the guerilla threat was growing.

During 1960 and 1961 two questions influenced America's policy toward Vietnam. First, what should be given Diem with which to fight the Communists? Second, what should be demanded in return, if anything? By the time Kennedy took office the intensity of the Communist threat had become apparent. Durbrow's reports expressed the seriousness of the

situation and his lack of success in efforts to persuade the GVN to assume the initiative and regain control in the countryside.

1961 -- The Year of the Commitment

Eisenhower gave little attention to Indochina until it became apparent that the governments there were in serious danger of being overcome by Communist elements. Senator Mike Mansfield displayed the most interest in the area among the members of Congress. Yet, seven years separated his visits to Vietnam in 1955 and 1962. Secretary of State Dulles visited Vietnam in 1955 and was followed the next year by Vice President Nixon. After that, no one above the level of an assistant secretary toured the region until Vice President Johnson went to Southeast Asia in 1961. As a result, President Diem was considered incorruptible and Washington relaxed its restrictions on the use of financial aid. Although Diem was honest he was susceptible to those around him, particularly his own family. Nhu convinced him to use some of the aid as financial support for the Diemist Can Lao party, and a second brother, Monsignor Thuc, persuaded him to grant economic advantages to the Catholic clergy. Kennedy inherited a commitment linked to the fortunes of Diem.[9]

One of Kennedy's first acts as President was to summon Brigadier General Edward Lansdale. Lansdale, the Pentagon expert on counterguerilla warfare, had been in Vietnam studying the situation. His major concern had been the failure to use political power to back the cause of nationalism and conduct the war in ways that would counter the successful guerilla effort.[10] His account revealed that conditions in the countryside were precarious and that the military methods and civilian structure

used were all wrong for a guerilla war. To win, he believed, Washington needed to be firm in demanding reorganization of the military. He called for strong support for the GVN and an immediate demonstration of America's intentions to gain confidence and help Diem stablize his position in the countryside. Among Lansdale's recommendations were the transfer of Durbrow and the adoption of social, economic, political, and military aid programs.[11]

On January 28 Kennedy approved a Counterinsurgency Plan /CIP/ that had been developed during 1960. The CIP, as it was gradually implemented, became the basis for the expansion of aid to the GVN. Negotiations on the Plan lasted from February 13 to mid-May. The CIP assumed that the GVN possessed the potential to oppose the Communists if corrective reforms were taken and adequate forces were provided. It implied that the forces would be supplied by the United States in exchange for internal changes. The CIP offered an additional $28.4 million to support a 20,000-man increase in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam /ARVN/ and $12.7 million for a 32,000-man Civil Guard. The major recommendations of the CIP for reforms were not realized during Diem's tenure.

During the discussions of the CIP, Diem stalled on the implementation of the major points while Washington waited to release the flow of aid. During this period, the JCS and the MAAG became impatient to get on with the war. The final breakthrough came when Durbrow, after four years of service in Saigon, was releived by Frederick Nolting in early May. Diem then made some major promises of reform. However, these took the form of decrees and no actual changes came about.[12] Washington failed to force him to make meaningful reforms and released the aid.

Nolting was assigned the task of repairing the damage done to United States-GVN relations. Diem and Nhu were pleased with the new Ambassador and relations did improve somewhat although Nolting actually accomplished no more than Durbrow had. The desire in Washington was for Nolting to coax Saigon into making reforms and broadening its political and social bases. This was theoretically sound but unrealistic. The GVN rejected most proposals primarily because Nhu's ideas about democracy and the American mission in Vietnam differed from those held in Washington.

McNamara, responding to a proposal from Lansdale, directed Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric on April 20 to appraise the situation and make recommendations to prevent the further progress of Communism in South Vietnam. The report was to be ready for Kennedy on the twenty-seventh. Free to handle the task at his own discretion, Gilpatric formed an interagency task force with himself and Lansdale as co-directors.

The Gilpatric report, submitted on April 26, showed a more serious VC threat than had been visualized in January when Lansdale estimated enemy strength at between 3,000 and 15,000 men. The task force report placed the number at 12,000 and reported a fourfold increase in incidents during the period, presumably in reaction to the spring elections. The task force considered Diem's re-election, in what was actually a meaningless formality, as a demonstration of stability and the ability to prevent disruption of the "democratic" process. Coming when it did, the re-election helped make late April an opportune time for Kennedy's Administration to re-evaluate America's Vietnam policy.[13] Whereas the reported statistics indicated rapid deterioration of the situation in

Vietnam, no recommendations were made to increase the size of the RVNAF. What Gilpatric and Lansdale proposed was the extension of more generous financial aid for the forces outlined in the CIP.

A more important aspect of the Gilpatric report was the interest shown in counterinsurgency warfare and the desire for increased informality and efficiency in implementing policies. The report called for a co-ordinated effort of at least the Departments of State and Defense, the CIA, and the International Cooperation Administration [ICA]. After a program had been worked out, the idea was to be implemented in clear support of a particular individual.

Kennedy believed that the world was demanding a demonstration of America's strength and resolve. The Laotian crisis was nearing a climax. The agreement to strive for a cease-fire and the formation of a neutral coalition government in Laos had been reached by the end of April. On May 16, 1961, the fourteen nation conference on Laos began. The start of this meeting indicated a measure of stability in Laos. During the conference, it became evident that North Vietnamese were not only fighting in Laos, but were also improving a network of trails over which political cadres and military specialists were moving to South Vietnam to bolster the VC. It was during this conference that the attention of Hanoi and Washington shifted fully to the Vietnam situation.[14]

The Laotian problem and the start of the Geneva Conference were not the only international incidents which affected Kennedy's policy toward Vietnam. The Bay of Pigs invasion ended the day before the creation of Gilpatric's task force. Above all else, Kennedy feared that the incident revealed weakness in his resolve. The historian Stephen Ambrose equated this fear with the policies of the determined Cold Warriors. Like them,

Kennedy felt that strength was necessary to deal with the Russians and their associates. McNamara maintained that the United States needed superior strength.[15]

One element of Kennedy's policies benefitted from the Bay of Pigs. The incident added to his determination to develop a means of countering wars of liberation. To fulfill this need in the nation's defense system, he promoted a counterinsurgency program currently under development. Vietnam provided the first chance to implement this weapon. To Kennedy it was almost a perfect place to become involved. He could show America's interest in the Third World, demonstrate America's resolve to live up to commitments, and play the game of counterinsurgency.[16]

The Gilpatric task force submitted its report to the NSC on April 27, but due to the acuteness of the Laos crisis it received little attention. The report recommended further build up of some programs to infuse new urgency and create action in almost every area in an attempt to increase the viability of Saigon as a democratic government. No ARVN increase was deemed necessary and only a minor increase of MAAG forces was proposed. The emphasis was placed on the need for governmental reforms. Gilpatric recommended that Lansdale be sent to consult with officials in Saigon and make recommendations for further action. McNamara made this assignment contingent on a request from the Embassy. The request never came.

An annex was added to the report the following day in response to the Laotian situation. It recommended a two-division increase of ARVN and the deployment of 3,600 American troops to help train them. The rationale for this was to enable the ARVN to resist a conventional invasion of the country. Kennedy failed to act on this Laos annex.

On April 29, Kennedy approved the limited military recommendations to increase MAAG from 685 to 785 troops to train the proposed 20,000-man ARVN enlargement. He further authorized MAAG to support and advise the Self-Defense Corps of 40,000 men and Military Assistance Program /MAP/ aid for the entire 68,000-man Civil Guard instead of the 32,000 previously sustained. His final order was for the installation of radar surveillance equipment and MAP aid for a Vietnamese Junk Force.[17]

The authors of the Pentagon Papers played down the significance of Kennedy's actions. The recommendations made merely expanded on the previously approved CIP, meaning that military aid would be given a little more generously. But the action on the basis of Gilpatric's report was important at the time and was destined to become even more vital. Kennedy's increase of MAAG by 100 men was the first military expansion of outside forces since the Geneva Accords were signed in 1954. This action violated those agreements which stipulated that neither the Communist controlled North nor the non-Communist South was to permit any further introduction of troops into their respective regions.[18]

Washington termed its actions a response to North Vietnamese violations of the Geneva Accords. The Administration saw a deteriorating situation during 1960 and 1961 with the VC gaining control in the countryside and the ICC unable to restore peace. Assistance was the only practical course of action visualized. The Department of State's question and answer publication "Viet-Nam: The Struggle for Freedom" released in August 1964 claimed that "at their /South Vietnam's/ urgent request U.S. military and economic assistance was substantially increased."[19]

Deputy Under Secretary of State George Ball attempted to regain control of policy formation on May 3 when he sent a memorandum to the Gilpatric task force proposing that it be reorganized and placed under the leadership of an official from State and the role outlined for Lansdale be deleted. Ball's proposals prevailed, and he became the chairman of a new interagency group which submitted a second draft of Gilpatric's report on May 6 which closely followed the first draft and the two above proposals. However, the concept of the task force suffered from this move and was relegated to a secondary status.[20] This reflected Kennedy's preference to receive information influenced by the military over that deriving from the State Department and more diplomatic in nature. This fact contradicts the claims of Kennedy's admirers that he had learned as a result of the Bay of Pigs not to rely upon the advice offered by the military experts.

Early in May, the question of American troops in Vietnam began to arise. The problem of how to reassure Vietnam and Thailand was the topic discussed at an NSC meeting of the fifth. At a press conference that afternoon Kennedy was asked about reports that he would send American forces to Vietnam if necessary to prevent a Communist take-over there. His answer indicated his desire to keep the future course on the matter open to various alternatives. He said the question was being considered and that Vice President Johnson would discuss it with the GVN during his upcoming visit to the area.[21]

On May 8, Gilpatric requested the opinion of the JCS on a possible troop commitment. The reply, dated May 10, put the Chiefs on record as favoring deployment. They believed that forces should be sent immediately to keep Southeast Asia outside the Communist sphere of

influence. The action should be taken so the troops would already be in Vietnam if a combat situation developed. They could serve as a visible deterrent to potential North Vietnamese-CHICOM actions, relieve the RVNAF from defensive duties, assist in training RVNAF personnel, provide a nucleus for future military operations, and indicate the firmness of America's commitment to Asia. The JCS recommended that "Diem be encouraged to request that the United States fulfill its SEATO obligation, in view of the new threat now posed by the Laotian situation, by the immediate deployment of appropriate U.S. forces to South Vietnam."[22] This reinterpreted Article IV of the SEATO Pact which stated that in the event of a threat to the peace of the area "the Parties shall consult immediately in order to agree on the measure which should be taken for the common defense."[23]

At a NSC session on May 11, Kennedy noted that a study of the question of troops was currently in process but avoided saying any more than he had publicly on May 5. As to the other military issues, he reconfirmed the decisions previously made on the April 26 and May 6 drafts. This consisted of keeping all options open for further review and providing the assistance needed to improve the GVN's ability to secure its own stability.[24] Thus it appeared that at the time of the Johnson trip no firm and limitless commitment had been made. Kennedy had authorized an increase of American troops; but they remained as advisers, not combatants. American aid was not contingent upon reforms by Saigon. But it was directed by the CIP. Finally, any future actions were to be carefully studied and reviewed prior to being activated.

Vice President Johnson visited Southeast Asia from May 9 to May 15 with three objectives. First, he was to observe and submit an independent

report on the situation. Second, he was to reassure Diem of United States support. Finally, he was to pressure the President into carrying out reforms. Johnson reported that he succeeded in halting the decline of Saigon's confidence in Washington. Any real progress made during the private talks was sacrificed in the public statements following the visit. With what was obviously Kennedy's full endorsement, Johnson reiterated Washington's commitment.

The Joint Communiqúe released in Saigon on May 13 revealed the positions of both capitals. They viewed the situation as a brutal and systematic assault by Communists from the North on the independence of South Vietnam and agreed that strengthened and accelereated action was warranted to meet this assault. Washington recognized the efforts of the people under Diem and its obligation "in its own self-interest as well as in the interests of other free peoples" to aid in the struggle against Communist subversion and terror. Agreement was reached on measures to be taken to increase and accelerate assistance with the stipulation that they might be augmented later if both parties felt the situation warranted additional action.[25]

Johnson's report was significant because it confirmed the extension of containment to Southeast Asia and crystalized support for the Diem regime. The thrust of the report was that, if the United States failed to support the GVN, the confrontation with Communism would next be in California. All of the top advisers concurred with this observation. But none ever explained why or how the collapse of Diem would cause abandonment of other bases in Asia.[26] Most members of the Administration felt that a pullout would indicate that the United States did not stand by its pledges to its allies. Kennedy considered this when he decided

upon the image he wished to present in Southeast Asia.

Johnson recommended that immediate steps be taken to aid South Vietnam in its self-defense. He felt that, with the restoration of faith among the people in the GVN, the battle would assume new strength and determination. He saw no viable alternative to American leadership in the area but felt that all aid given must be part of an allied effort and contingent on the willingness of the GVN to use it effectively. Combat troops were neither required nor desired by the Saigon leaders. Johnson felt their deployment would be a mistake adding to the anti-colonial sentiment throughout the country and thus actually aiding the VC.[27] This coincided with Diem's analysis that an influx of American forces would add credence to the Communist accusation that he was a front for American imperialism.[28]

Labeling Vietnam an important trouble spot, Johnson favored continued support of Diem rather than allowing the country to fall to Communism. To him a minimum of $50 million worth of military and economic aid would be needed to support the RVN. He stipulated that the military aid program was the more important. While cautioning that a firm commitment would cost heavily and possibly require future combat troop deployment, Johnson recommended a program of strong action. Thus he added an element of pressure on Kennedy to decide in favor of intervention.

Events by mid-June indicated a growing desire among some officials in Saigon and in Washington for United States troops in the RVN. Part of Johnson's mission had been to discuss the possibility of forces being sent to Vietnam. In a letter dated May 15, Diem guaranteed Kennedy that the question would be studied and decisions would be forthcoming.

Nguyen Dinh Thuan brought the promised letter to Kennedy on June 14. Diem requested an increase of aid sufficient to cover an addition to the RVNAF which would bring their strength up to 270,000 men. This increase of approximately 100,000 was significantly larger than the 20,000-man addition proposed in the CIP. Essential to this increase, he said, was an expansion of MAAG by selected elements to establish training centers for the new RVNAF personnel and provide evidence of America's determination to halt Communism's spread. Diem pointed out that these proposals had been developed with the advice of MAAG Saigon.[29] Nowhere in his proposals did Diem speak of a desire to have American combat troops in South Vietnam.

A memorandum from Lansdale to Gilpatric on May 18 noted that Diem rejected combat troops per se while emphasizing that troops for training purposes were acceptable. Simultaneously, MAAG Chief, Lieutenant General Lionel McGarr, requested that 16,000 troops from combat units be sent to establish training centers. "If Diem would not accept 16,000, McGarr would settle for 10,000 men."[30] This opinion appeared to be consistent among military people. However, no evidence indicated that either Kennedy or Diem agreed with the need for combat troops in any role. The Pentagon Papers stated that the training mission was a disguise conceived by military leaders to gain for the maneuver acceptance from Diem and United States Congressional opponents. It was unrealistic to believe that troops could be stationed in the RVN and not make contact with the VC.[31]

Kennedy's reasoning for deciding against deploying troops in May was unclear. Sorensen later claimed that the President was skeptical due to the recent Bay of Pigs and the Laotian problem.[32] Due to the

lack of evidence, this conclusion seems unsound; especially when the flow of aid to South Vietnam continued.

A note from Walt Rostow to McNamara stating that Thailand was more important problematically and Vietnam could wait for later action was written about June 5. He stated that a guerilla deterrence operation in Thailand's northeast was needed and that forces to support a counter-guerilla war in Vietnam would be required later. The note then listed the types of troops Rostow felt would be needed. Significantly, these were exactly the kinds Kennedy later sent for combat support and advisory purposes. The message further suggested that those closest to Kennedy agreed with his position that combat troops should not be deployed. The authors of the Pentagon Papers indicate that this was the beginning of a pattern. Someone was always promoting the deployment of troops, but Kennedy avoided making a final decision that could lead to ground contact between American and VC forces.[33]

A second major mission to Vietnam was headed by Professor Eugene Staley from mid-June to July 7. The group consisted of economists assigned to work with the Vietnamese to correct their inability to finance the war effort. Instead of concentrating on economic problems, the discussions turned to the question of force levels within the country. Although admittedly incompetent to judge this, the Staley group presented two plans based upon "economic planning purposes" and dependent on the Laotian situation. They felt that if Laos survived and the amount of insurgency remained constant, 200,000 men would be needed. If the Communists gained de facto control of Laos and the VC then increased their activities significantly, a level of 270,000 men would be required.[34]

The New York Times reported on July 17 that Staley's group had

devised plans for military and economic programs to defeat the Communists. The programs, in effect, classified Vietnam as a testing site for newly developed tactics of jungle warfare.[35] The agreements reached were released by a GVN official on July 18 and reported in the Times the next day. They covered the period from July 1, 1961, to December 31, 1962. The emphasis was placed on a crash program to improve internal security with a substantial increase of military forces, civil guard, and self-defense units. The major portion of projected aid was earmarked to revitalize the agroville project, renamed the Strategic Hamlet Program. Military assistance in the form of equipment was to be given directly while economic aid was incorporated into a commercial import program.[36]

As fall approached the situation in South Vietnam seemed to improve, and optimism characterized the reports originating in Saigon. A National Intelligence Estimate [NIE], although predicting a long, hard struggle ahead, reported that the RVNAF had performed more effectively in 1961 than during the preceeding year. The only real threat seen was the possibility of a coup d'etat which would result in GVN's collapse and thus endanger the war effort. Militarily, the report was relatively optimistic. McGarr said on September 1 that the increased effectiveness of the RVNAF and America's demonstration of support had revewed the intent of all to defeat the Communists. However, reports on the political situation were not as hopeful. Generally, they stated that Diem was actually doing little to improve his popularity among the people.

Unofficial reports told a totally different story. Theodore White warned in August that the situation was continuing to deteriorate, especially in the countryside. His pessimism was soon confirmed when VC raids in September numbered 450 compared to an average of 150 for

the preceding months. By the end of the month, the official reports from Saigon were once again discussing a worsening situation. Nolting reported on September 28 that the political status of the GVN had remained relatively stable during the month but he believed the increase of VC activity indicated no real change in the fighting.

The day following Nolting's report President Diem surprised him with a request for a GVN-United States treaty. Diem's actions apparently had the effect in Washington of confirming White's warning. The State Department viewed the situation as being more grave than the Embassy did. A situation summary distributed about October 1 referred to Nolting's cable but not Diem's treaty request and accepted the Ambassador's description of the political situation but painted a bleaker picture about the military one. In essence the State paper conceded that while the effectiveness of the RVNAF was improving, it was doing so at a rate slower than the Viet Cong's. The summary also conceded that the majority of the VC still had southern origins and that the bulk of weapons and supplies were captured and not externally provided. The belief that the enemy was prepared to accept a stalemate in Laos and increase activity in South Vietnam added further concern to the paper.[37]

In October, many high level officials wished to send troops to Vietnam. A memo from Walt Rostow dated October 5 suggested stationing 25,000 SEATO forces along the Vietnam-Laos border to stop infiltration. The JCS rejected this idea and submitted a counter-proposal on the tenth. The Chiefs supported a more concentrated effort in Laos believing that the securing of that country would help insure the safety of Thailand and Vietnam. The JCS felt that if this proposal were politically unfeasible, about 20,000 troops should be sent to the central highlands of

of the RVN to assist in regaining some of the territory and to free the RVNAF there for offensive action against the VC.[38]

The NSC, meeting on October 11, considered four papers on the Vietnam problem. The first, drafted by Deputy Under Secretary of State Alexis Johnson, combined the major points of the Rostow and the JCS papers. The second, a special NIE, presented a more pessimistic and realistic view of the situation estimating that any SEATO action would probably result in a response from the DRV, the VC, and the Soviet Union capable of thwarting the move. It also predicted that the reluctance of France and the United Kingdom to participate would be difficult, if not impossible, to overcome. The third paper, entitled "Supplemental Note 2," presented a JCS estimate that the SNIE proposal of 20,000 to 25,000 men was only a first step and one that could encourage the Soviets to cause trouble in other areas, such as Berlin or Korea. The JCS believed that 40,000 troops would eventually be required to "clean up the Viet Cong threat" and an additional 128,000 would be needed to counter potential DRV/CHICOM intervention.[39]

The final paper discussed was a candid note from William Bundy, acting Assistant Secretary of Defense, Office of International Security Affairs /ISA/, to McNamara. Bundy felt immediate action was necessary to stop the VC. He believed that early action had the potential to prove successful, but "it all depends on Diem's effectiveness, which is problematical" any delay would only increase the chances of a defeat.[40]

The only available record of the NSC meeting of October 11 is a Gilpatric memorandum outlining the general course of action to be taken. Three major projects were to be pursued. First, authority was granted the Department of Defense /DOD/ to send the Air Force's specially

trained counterinsurgency squadron, Jungle Jim, "to serve under MAAG as a training mission and not for combat at the present time." Second, the NSC decided that General Maxwell Taylor and Walt Rostow would visit Saigon to study the political and military feasibility of a troop commitment. Finally, the State Department was to continue to protest to the ICC about North Vietnam supplying the VC, to table a United Nations paper concerning Communist violations of the 1954 Geneva Accords, and to consult with the members of SEATO, particularly Great Britain and Australia, about united action.[41]

Kennedy was scheduled to announce at a press conference that afternoon that the Taylor mission had an economic purpose. He did not announce it as such and was noncommital when asked if the question of combat troops was to be discussed. News leaks prior to the press conference indicated that the Administration was considering sending combat troops to Vietnam. Kennedy evaded in what had become a customary manner, saying that "we're going to wait till General Taylor comes back and brings us an up-to-date description of the situation, particularly in Viet-Nam."[42] The press understood the statement to mean that Taylor was going to study the question of combat troops and reported as such the following day.

On October 14, the New York Times published an explanation of Taylor's mission supplied by a source very close to the President, if not Kennedy himself. Taylor was going to look into a number of issues with the question of troops the least important. This story asserted that the top military leaders were "understood to be reluctant to send organized U.S. combat units into Southeast Asia. Pentagon plans for this area stressed the importance of countering Communist guerillas with troops from the affected countries, perhaps trained and equipped by the U.S.,

but not supplanted by U.S. troops."[43] As the evidence presented above indicates, this was a flase understanding.

Members of the military had been recommending and members of the Administration had been considering United States combat troops for the RVN since Kennedy took office. The obvious implication was that Washington was making a concerted effort to deceive the American people about the situation in Vietnam and opinions concerning it. The Pentagon Papers writers speculated that this possible ploy was due to Kennedy's displeasure over Diem's recent request relayed by Nolting on October 13 for "US combat units or units to be introduced into SVN /South Vietnam/ as 'combat-trainer units'." He may have suspected that Diem based his request on recent stories emanating from Washington or simply wanted to quell the expectations that troops would be sent. Even if neither of these applied, one point stood out. Kennedy still wanted to avoid a firm commitment and keep all possible alternative open.[44]

During Taylor's mission to Saigon, he was to appraise the situation and return with proposals to prevent its further deterioration. His guidelines for judgement were based on the idea that, winning or losing, the war was Vietnam's task and America's actions were to be measured. Besides the military aspects, he was to consider economic, social, and political problems. On the day he arrived, Diem declared a national emergency due to a devastating flood. This disaster influenced the course of discussions and the recommendations Taylor made in his report.

Upon returning to Washington, Taylor and Rostow reported that South Vietnam was vital enough to the national interest to justify a major American effort. Taylor considered lack of confidence the main problem and recommended increased intervention to allay that apprehension. Rostow

felt that the current government of South Vietnam would be satisfactory if Diem were pressed to make reforms. Both men agreed that the situation in Vietnam at the time was serious but not hopeless.

The emphasis of the Taylor-Rostow report was on the military situation and responses. Kennedy complied with that concept and from then on the DOD became more influential in forming the Vietnam policy as the Department of State slipped into the background. Kennedy allowed this development because Vietnam was condiered a low level crisis compared to other issues in 1961. Furthermore, the senior officials in Saigon thought that because of Diem's statesmanship and the strategic hamlet project the strategy of unconditional support and military advisers was proving successful.[45]

The report submitted to Kennedy discussed the VC strategy and threat and the weaknesses of Diem's regime. The major proposals focused on a shift of America's role from adviser to partner. Taylor and Rostow recommended enlarging that role by increasing the number of advisers assisting the RVNAF and the government and the deployment of 10,000 combat troops for self-defense, perimeter security, and emergency use purposes. They concluded that the program would succeed only if infiltration from the North ceased. If it did not, they proposed a contingency plan of retaliation to match the intensity of the support. To Rostow, this meant bombing North Vietnam.[46]

Further proposals included sending American-manned helicopters to increase ARVN's mobility and American-manned Air Force units for close ground support. These significant recommendations were

> made in 1961 when the conflict was still at a low level of violence, moved directly away from counter-guerilla and counterinsurgency warfare and toward large-scale conventional

> operations featuring artillery, bomber aircraft, and other weapons of great destructive power. Ingrained preferences as to military means were thus already beginning to subordinate political purposes and dictate strategy.[47]

Kennedy accepted the majority of the recommendations made in the report. He rejected the troop deployment, feeding that it would prove to be the first step in the growth of GVN desire for more American combatants. He "stressed that the Vietnamese war could only be won so long as it was their war."[48]

Kennedy also rejected Rostow's contingency bombing proposals. Taylor stated that the mission revealed the real source of the guerilla strength was in North Vietnam. "But," he claimed, "being prudent men, we decided first to make every effort to bring the situation under control without going north of the Seventeenth Parallel."[49] Thus the question of bombing the DRV was postponed.

An SNIE dated November 5 listed what were presumably the major courses of action open in late 1961. These included: 1) an increase in the number of advisers and their roles; 2) the deployment of 8,000 to 10,000 troops for flood relief assistance; 3) the sending of 25,000 to 40,000 combat troops to engage the VC alongside the RVNAF; and in conjunction with one of these, 4) the announcement of America's determination to maintain South Vietnam while warning Hanoi that its continued support of the VC would result in United States air strikes against the DRV. This fourth option contained the potential of a direct confrontation with Moscow and Peking. The SNIE concluded that the threat to bomb the North would not deter Hanoi's supply of the VC and that actual bombing would make a response from the Soviets and CHICOM imperative.[50]

On November 8, McNamara, in conjunction with the JCS and Gilpatric,

prepared a memorandum for Kennedy. In it he reiterated the basic issue expressed in Taylor's report: whether or not the United States should commit itself to the GVN and support a decision to do so with immediate actions and long-range plans.

One of the striking points of the paper was the estimate that a maximum of 205,000 men would be required even in Hanoi and Peking made direct moves to intervene. A second, and more important, point told the President that if he agreed to send an initial 8,000 men, ostensibly for flood relief, he should be prepared for further troop deployments. The additional troops would be required whehter Hanoi intervened or not based on the earlier evaluation by the JCS. Kennedy's predicament was either to take the first major step toward combat involvement or to allow the GVN to fall.[51]

This message alone did not clarify McNamara's position. A second memo, on which he collaborated with Rusk, helped to define his attitudes and became the basis for the National Security Action Memorandum [NSAM] which formalized Kennedy's final decisions of 1961. As the authors of the Pentagon Papers pointed out, the fourth section was the most important part of the memo. This section, concerned with how American troops would be employed, divided the forces into two categories. Group A consisted of modestly sized units for immediate support of the RVNAF's efforts. The units included in category B were more important because they were "larger units with actual or potential direct military missions." The introduction of this group would increase the probability of intervention by the Communist bloc nations. The memo noted that

> the employment of United States comat [sic] forces (in the absence of Communist bloc escalation) involves a certain dilemma: if there is a strong South-Vietnamese effort, they may not be needed; if there is not such an effort,

> United States forces could not accomplish their mission in the mist of an apathetic or hostile population. Under present circumstances, therefore, the question of injecting United States and SEATO combat forces should in large part be considered as a contribution to the morale of the South Viet-Namese in their own effort to do the principal job themselves.[52]

Thus it appeared that Rusk and McNamara had joined the military leaders in their belief that a substantial troop commitment would be necessary to save the existing GVN. Both of these November memos distinctly warned that despite the magnitude of the American commitment, the effort was in danger of proving unsuccessful without a determined effort by the RVNAF. The second memo made this distinction more precise and more important than the first due to the force incorporated into Section Four and the fact that it was prepared by two Cabinet members.

Kennedy obviously approved of the memorandum because he accepted it almost verbatim. The Pentagon Papers authors suggested that this might have been due to the fact that this second paper, compared to the first, was "obviously more to the President's liking (and, in the nature of such things, quite possibly drawn up to the President's specifications)."[53] This conclusion paralleled the one Ambrose drew concerning Kennedy's actions during the Bay of Pigs crisis and discredited the belief that Kennedy had learned from that disaster and would avoid making the same mistakes again. In fact, Kennedy made the same error in November. He listened to only what he wanted to hear espoused by those from whom he wanted to hear it. Kennedy had avoided making a decision regarding troops all year. Finally, in November he received the advice he wanted from the advisers he had surrounded himself with after the April venture.

NSAM 111, as signed on November 22, contained the recommendations

made by McNamara and Rusk with one deletion. That exception would have committed Washington "to the objective of preventing the fall of South Viet-Nam to Communism" and that United States troops along with other SEATO forces might be needed to achieve this goal. If accepted, this proposal would have included a unilateral pledge by Washington. The recommendation concluded that "if it is necessary to commit outside forces to achieve the foregoing objective our decision to introduce United States forces should not be contingent upon unanimous SEATO agreement thereto."[54] This rejection was consistent with Kennedy's position during the preceding months during which he had avoided making a definite commitment while keeping the door open to all alternatives.

A cable informing Nolting of Kennedy's decision was apparently sent on November 14. The major difference between the cable and the McNamara-Rusk memo was added emphasis on the use of pressure to persuade Diem to make reforms. The motives inspiring Diem's reply were undeterminable. The authors of the Pentagon Papers failed to distinguish between what they termed as either a bargaining "tactic" or "counter". However, the discouragement that Thuan expressed to Nolting on November 20 appeared to achieve its purpose of gaining a reversal of America's policies. Advice from John Kenneth Galbraith also influenced Kennedy's position. As a result of these two expressions, the policies were reversed and the emphasis on reforms relaxed.

Galbraith visited Saigon at Kennedy's request during a return trip to his ambassadorial post in India. On November 20, he cabled that efforts to bargain with Diem would prove futile. He stated that "there is scarcely the slightest practical chance that the administrative and political reforms now being pressed will result in real change . . . there

is no solution that does not involve a change in government." His opinion of the status of the insurgency could become more optimistic "provided Diem was replaced."[55]

The Pentagon Papers writers described the negotiations in Saigon in late November in the following manner. First, Diem was obviously disappointed with Kennedy's proposed bargain. Second, Kennedy realized he was offering less and demanding more than Diem expected. Third, Diem supporters, such as Lansdale, agreed with his critics, such as Galbraith, that attempts to pressure the South Vietnamese President to make reforms were in vain. Finally, there was some unrest within the Administration in Washington over the extent of the United States proposal.[56]

Washington soon backed away from its demands for a share of the decision-making process within the GVN. A cable drafted by Alexis Johnson and Walt Rostow on December 7 eliminated United States participation in the political and economic decisions and retained only influence in forming the military policies as they affected the RVN's security situation. Kennedy decided to increase the number of advisers in South Vietnam. When 1961 ended, instead of the 685 men there when the year began, the United States had 1,364 military personnel in South Vietnam.[57] In less than a year, President Kennedy and his advisers had shaped a commitment to South Vietnam that would set the nation in an ever deepening quagmire.

1961 -- THE YEAR IN REVIEW

A series of crises characterized 1961. John Kennedy's admirers claim that he met each problem separately and emerged from each a better man and a more mature President. They credit him with the capacity to learn from his errors and experiences so that he would never repeat a mistake. But Kennedy was not challenged by all the crises that his supporters claimed. Instead, with the possible exception of the Laotian problem, Kennedy himself created the crises with which he had to deal during the year. He could have cancelled the Bay of Pigs operation. He could have gone to Vienna with a more open mind about United States-Soviet relations. He could have listened to the advice of those calling for the application of pressure on the Diem government to undertake reforms in South Vietnam. Finally, Kennedy could have fulfilled his campaign promise and pursued new foreign policies instead of choosing to continue the approach to the Cold War initiated under Truman and developed under Eisenhower.

Kennedy entered office believing that the Soviet Union continued to be America's primary adversary in all corners of the globe. Therefore, his policies aimed at containing the influence of the Communists in order to maintain the existing balance of power. He followed the pattern established by former Secretaries of State Dean Acheson and John Foster Dulles and personified by his own Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, and Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara. To these advisers and the Presidents they served, the only way to deal effectively with the Russians

was from a position of strength. To Kennedy's Administration, this meant a position of military superiority. Kennedy was determined to present an image of superiority, even if realities did not always fit the image.

Above all Kennedy feared appearing weak and irresolute in the eyes of the world during a crisis situation. He was determined that this would not be the case and that his image would be one of firmness and resolution. This attitude affected his major policy decisions during 1961. He felt cancelling the Cuban invasion would have been a renunciation of his campaign promise to undertake a more vigorous policy toward Communism in the Western Hemisphere. His decision to accept the blame for the Bay of Pigs was an attempt to admit his error and present an image of a man who had learned from experience and would avoid similar errors in the future. At the same time, he wanted the nation's enemies, i.e., the Soviet Union, not to mistake his restraint as weakness and thus risk a confrontation that could lead to a general war which he was prepared to fight to defend the United States' national interests.

Likewise, Kennedy felt that if he presented Khrushchev with what might appear to be a willingness to give up Berlin through negotiations, he would be presenting an image indicating that he was ready to abandon Eastern Europe to the Soviets. Therefore, he presented a rigid image in Vienna to indicate that he was more willing to risk the miscalculations he warned were possible rather than have Khrushchev regard him as an indecisive person who would abandon Washington's commitments if the threat of war existed. Finally, he regarded Southeast Asia as the area where he could prove himself a strong President. He offered to negotiate about Laos but at the same time continued to maintain his personal dignity

by threatening to intervene with American military power. In Vietnam, he bolstered the Diem government in an effort to save that country from supposed external aggression as Roosevelt had done for Argentina and Truman for Turkey and Greece. Kennedy chose Southeast Asia as the area where he would prove to the Soviets that he was willing to go to any lengths to avoid war as long as America's interests were not endangered. Although he was genuinely sympathetic toward the poorer people of the world, John Kennedy permitted his anti-Communist emotions and his concern for his own image to guide his foreign policies.

The learning situations from which Kennedy's admirers claimed he profitted occurred in 1961. Contrary to the contentions that he did, Kennedy was unable, or perhaps unwilling, to grasp the full significance of them. After the Bay of Pigs fiasco he turned from the experienced military advisers in the Department of Defense to the inner circle of advisers who accompanied him into the White House. Even though the advice he received did not change with shifting conditions, Kennedy again accepted it. The experts he inherited from Eisenhower supported a potentially successful military venture in Cuba. The personal appointees of Walt Rostow and Maxwell Taylor recommended similar action in Vietnam where they believed American military power could persevere.

Kennedy's decision to increase the size of the American commitment to South Vietnam late in 1961 was the greatest indication of his concern for his image and desire to maintain the status quo during the year. He chose to make a final stand in South Vietnam against the advance of Communism. Kennedy's ideas about containment, the need to avoid a direct confrontation with the Soviet Union, counterinsurgency, and the nation's proper image led to the tragedy of United States military involvement in

the Vietnam War. Kennedy maintained throughout the year that all possible solutions to a problem must be considered before the final course of action was determined. The ultimate guideline for all of these decisions was how it would cause the United States to be seen in the eyes of the world.

Kennedy had the opportunities to learn during 1961. When the CFF were defeated on the beaches of Cuba, it was because Kennedy made a late change from dependence on military advisers who placed the emphasis on success to political advisers who questioned how the world might view the venture. In December he chose to listen to those advocating a military victory in Vietnam instead of the men, like Galbraith, who counseled for reforms that would correct the problems there. A military victory against Communist aggression would be more impressive than a decision to negotiate. In Paris and Vienna he received the advice of de Gaulle and Khrushchev to avoid committing combat forces to a war in Southeast Asia. Yet, late in the year he ignored this advice and sent ground troops to South Vietnam. Kennedy committed the nation to the objective of defeating a native insurgency with military might instead of pressing Diem to make the changes which would correct the conditions which created the problem. At the same time he ignored the fact that the international conference in Geneva was making progress toward a settlement of the Laotian problem. Finally, Kennedy forgot his own writings and speeches made while he served in the United States Senate. Instead of guaranteeing the Vietnamese people complete independence, which he had said in 1953 was essential for victory, Kennedy continued and actually increased American support of the repressive chief of state, Ngo Dinh Dinh.

Kennedy failed to conceive how these lessons would assist him in presenting a strong image to the world. A strong image was what he wanted to leave as his legacy. Instead Kennedy chose to leave an image based upon his determined stand against the advance of Communism and his ever present fear of appearing weak.

APPENDIX

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ARVN	--	Army of the Republic Vietnam
CDNI	--	"Committee for the Defense of National Interests"
CFF	--	Cuban Freedom Fighters
CHICOM	--	Chinese Communists
CIA	--	Central Intelligence Agency
CINCPAC	--	Commander in Chief, Pacific
CIP	--	Counterinsurgency Plan
DOD	--	Department of Defense
DRV	--	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
GVN	--	Government of Vietnam
ICC	--	International Control Commission
ISA	--	Office of International Security Affairs
JCS	--	Joint Chiefs of Staff
MAAG	--	Military Assistance Advisory Group
MAP	--	Military Assistance Program
NATO	--	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NIE	--	National Intelligence Estimate
NLF	--	National Liberation Front
NLHX	--	New Lao Hak Xat
NSAM	--	National Security Action Memorandum
NSC	--	National Security Council
OAS	--	Organization of American States
PEO	--	Program Evaluation Office
RVN	--	Republic of Vietnam
RVNAF	--	Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces
SEATO	--	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
VC	--	Vietnam Communists

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

[1]Richard J. Walton, Cold War and Counterrevolution: The Foreign Policy of John F. Kennedy, New York (1972), p.

[2]Seyom Brown, The Faces of Power: Constancy and Change in United States Foreign Policy from Truman to Johnson, New York (1968), p. 10.

[3]David Halberstam, The Best and the Brightest, New York (1972).

[4]U.S., President, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office), John F. Kennedy, 1961, p. 1. Herein after referred to as Public Papers.

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[7]Stephen E. Ambrose, Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy Since 1938, Baltimore (1971), p. 281.

[8]Public Papers, p. 2.

[9]Ibid., p. 22.

[10]Major General C. V. Clifton, "Hail to the Chief!," Army, January, 1964, p. 28.

CHAPTER II: VENTURE IN CUBA

[1]Theodore C. Sorensen, Kennedy, New York (1965), pp. 292-94.

[2]Ralph de Toledano, R.F.K.: The Man Who Would Be President, New York (1967), p. 254.

[3]Mario Lazo, Dagger in the Heart: American Policy Failures in Cuba, New York (1968), p. 251.

[4]Ibid. See also: Charles J.V. Murphy, "Cuba: The Record Set Straight," Fortune, September, 1961, p. 96.

[5]Murphy, "Cuba," p. 96.

[6]Lazo, Dagger in the Heart, p. 264.

[7]Ibid., p. 97.

[8]Murphy, "Cuba," pp. 96-97.

[9]Ibid., p. 97.

[10]U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Commerce, Fredom of Communications, S. Rept. 994, 87th Cong., 1st sess., 1961, I, 44.

[11]Ibid., p. 94.

[12]Ibid., p. 116.

[14]Ibid., p. 94.

[15]Ibid., p. 96.

[16]Ibid., p. 97.

[17]Ibid., p. 944.

[18]Ibid., p. 156.

[19]Ibid., p. 726.

[20]Ibid., p. 608.

[21]David Horowitz, The Free World Colossus: A Critique of American Foreign Policy in the Cold War, New York (1965), p. 354. The testimonies of pro-Batista ambassadors Earl T. Smith, a personal friend of John Kennedy, and Arthur Gardner formed the basis for this report.

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[23]Freedom of Communications, p. 44.

[24]Ibid., pp. 607-08.

[25]Ronald Hilton, "Commentary," Hispanic American Report, XII (November, 1960), 583.

[26]"Are We Training Cuban Guerrillas?," The Nation, November 19, 1960, p. 378.

[27]New York Times, January 16, 1961, p. 1.

[28]Pierre Salinger, With Kennedy, New York (1966), p. 54.

[29]Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., A Thousand Days, Greenwich, Connecticut (1967), p. 219. This date contradicted the one Schlesinger stated on page 157 when he wrote that November 18 was the first time Kennedy learned

of the decision to assist the Cuban exiles for possible Action. Salinger reported the date of the meeting as being the seventeenth, With Kennedy, p. 54.

[30]Sorensen, Kennedy, p. 295.

[31]Murphy, "Cuba," p. 97.

[32]Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 157.

[33]Ibid., p. 123.

[34]Philip W. Bonsal, Cuba, Castro, and the United States, Pittsburgh (1971), p. 183.

[35]U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Events in United States-Cuban Relations: A Chronology 1957-1963, by the Department of State, Committee Print, 88th Cong., 1st sess., 1963, p. 19.

[36]Bonsal, Cuba, p. 175.

[37]Events in United States-Cuban Relations, p. 19.

[38]Bonsal, Cuba, pp. 175-76.

[39]Ibid., pp. 176-77.

[40]Freedom of Communications, pp. 1163-64. Sorensen and Schlesinger disagreed on the origin of the phrase alianza para progresso. Sorensen assumed credit for suggesting alianza and credited Ernest Betancourt, a Cuban refugee and Latin American expert in Washington, with adding para el progresso, Kennedy, p. 533. Schlesinger credited Kennedy's adviser on Latin America, Richard Goodwin, for proposing alianza and Betancourt for the remainder at the request of Karl Meyer whom Goodwin had asked for suggestions, A Thousand Days, p. 183.

[41]Karl Meyer and Tad Szulc, The Cuban Invasion: The Chronicle of a Disaster, New York (1962), p. 101.

[42]Bonsal, Cuba, p. 177.

[43]Murphy, "Cuba," p. 97.

[44]Ibid., pp. 97 and 223.

[45]Ibid., p. 224.

[46]Toledano, R.F.K., p. 254.

[47]Ibid., p. 223.

[48]Lazo, Dagger in the Heart, p. 269.

[49]Murphy, "Cuba: The Record Set Straight," p. 224.

[50]Ibid.

[51]Lazo, Dagger in the Heart, p. 266.

[52]Meyer and Szulc, The Cuban Invasion, pp. 111-12. See also: Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, pp. 235-36.

[53]Meyer and Szulc, The Cuban Invasion, p. 110.

[54]Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 236.

[55]Lazo, Dagger in the Heart, pp. 252-53.

[56]Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, pp. 227-28.

[57]Ibid., p. 256.

[58]Sorensen, Kennedy, pp. 300-01. See Also: Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 252.

[59]Lazo, Dagger in the Heart, p. 256.

[60]Richard M. Nixon, "Cuba, Castro and John F. Kennedy," Reader's Digest, November, 1964, pp. 290-91.

[61]Lazo, Dagger in the Heart, pp. 256-27.

[62]Ibid., pp. 257 & 272.

[63]Ibid., p. 273.

[64]Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 254.

[65]Public Papers, pp. 258-59.

[66]United Nations, General Assembly, First Committee, 15th Session, April 15, 1961, Verbatim Record of the Eleven Hundred and Forty-Ninth Meeting, A/C.1/1149, pp. 11-16.

[67]Meyer and Szulc, The Cuban Invasion, p. 121.

[68]Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 255.

[69]There is no need in this paper for a discussion of the events which took place at the Bay of Pigs from April 17-19, 1961. Excellent analyses of the invasion may be found in Lazo, Dagger in the Heart, Meyer and Szulc, The Cuban Invasion, and Haynes Johnson, et al. The Bay of Pigs: The Leaders' Story of Brigade 2506, New York (1964).

[70]Bonsal, Cuba, p. 182.

[71]Ibid.

[72]Toledano, R.F.K., p. 258.

[73]Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, pp. 271-72.

[74]Sorensen, Kennedy, pp. 301-03. This explanation failed to consider Kennedy's opinions of the nation's and his own personal image and the considerations of world opinion which had caused the plan's destruction. It is the contention of this paper that, as Ambrose argues, these plans were in accord with Kennedy's concepts and although they were incorrect, they were wrong the way he wanted them to be. Ambrose, Rise to Globalism, p. 276.

[75]Tom Flaherty, "Anatomy of the Snafu," Life, May 3, 1963, pp. 80-81.

[76]Sorensen, Kennedy, pp. 304-05.

[77]Roger Hilsman, To Move A Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy, Garden City, New York (1967), pp. 78-79.

[78]Toledano, R.F.K., p. 260.

[79]Flaherty, "Anatomy of the Snafu," p. 81.

[80]Ibid., p. 83.

[81]Ibid., pp. 81-82.

[82]"Newest Evidence for the History Books: It Ruled Out U.S. Intervention," Life, May 3, 1963, p. 34.

[83]Public Papers, p. 304.

[84]U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations and Committee on Armed Services, Situation in Cuba, Hearings, before the Committee on Foreign Relations and the Committee on Armed Services, Senate, on S.J. Res. 226, S.J. Res. 227, S. Con. Res. 92, S. Res. 388, S. Res. 389, and S. Res. 390, 87th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1962, p. 106.

[85]Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, pp. 277-78.

CHAPTER III: CONFRONTATION IN VIENNA

[1]Walton, Cold War and Counterrevolution, p. 79.

[2]Freedom of Communications, p. 479.

[3]Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, pp. 324-25.

[4]Laurin L. Henry, "The Transition: The New Administration," The Presidential Election and Transition 1960-1961, ed. by Paul T. David, Washington, D.C., (1961), p. 259.

[5]Sorensen, Kennedy, p. 543.

[6]Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, pp. 320-21.

[7]Henry, "The Transition," pp. 258-59. During a birthday dinner speech in Boston on May 29, 1961, Kennedy told the audience that he was going to Vienna "not to conduct negotiations, but to get acquainted and exchange views on outstanding problems." Public Papers, p. 418.

[8]Brown, The Faces of Power, p. 230.

[9]Ambrose, Rise to Globalism, p. 280.

[10]Sorensen, Kennedy, p. 545.

[11]Ibid., p. 543.

[12]Hilsman, To Move A Nation, pp. 135-36.

[13]Evelyn Lincoln, My Twelve Years with John F. Kennedy, New York (1965), p. 271.

[14]Sorensen, Kennedy, p. 560.

[15]Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 326.

[16]Charles de Gaulle, Memoirs of Hope: Renewal and Endeavor, trans. by Terence Kilmartin, New York (1971), p. 258.

[17]Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 326.

[18]Ibid., p. 327.

[19]Ibid., p. 255.

[20]Ibid., pp. 255-56.

[22]Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 327.

[23]Public Papers, p. 437.

[24]No records of the Vienna meetings have been made public to date. Therefore, except where noted the following analysis was based entirely on the accounts presented by Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, pp. 333-48, and Sorensen, Kennedy, pp. 543-50.

[25]Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 334.

[26]Ibid., p. 336.

[27]Sorensen, Kennedy, p. 546.

[28]Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 336.

[29]Soresen, Kennedy, p. 546.

[30]Ibid., p. 548.

[31]Hilsman, To Move A Nation, p. 136.

[32]Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 338. Sorensen, Kennedy, p. 548.

[33]Freedom of Communications, p. 140.

[34]Ibid., p. 405.

[35]Ibid., p. 410.

[36]Ibid., p. 422.

[37]Walton, Cold War and Counterrevolution, p. 76.

[38]Freedom of Communications, p. 613.

[39]Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 323.

[40]Sorensen, Kennedy, p. 584.

[41]Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 323.

[42]Walton, Cold War and Counterrevolution, pp. 77-78.

[43]Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 354.

[44]Sorensen, Kennedy, p. 584.

[45]Freedom of Communications, p. 1273.

[46]Walton, Cold War and Counterrevolution, p. 78.

[47]Sorensen, Kennedy, p. 543.

[48]Ibid., p. 549.

[49]Ibid., p. 550.

[50]Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, pp. 350-51.

[51]The following analysis of that broadcast was based on the speech as printed in the Public Papers, pp. 441-46, from which all of the citations were taken.

[52]Public Papers, p. 418.

CHAPTER IV: THE "MESS" IN LAOS

[1]For an example of this prediction see U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Commerce, Freedom of Communications, S. Rept 994, 87th Cong., 1st sess., 1961, III, p. 154. During a joint radio-television broadcast with Vice Presdient Nixon, Kennedy criticized the concentration of aid to Laos on military preparations and asid that "we ought to know now that Laos is moving from neutralism in the direction of the Communists."

[2]Richard P. Stebbins, The United States in World Affairs 1961, New York (1962), p. 192.

[3]U.S., Department of State, Department of State Bulletin, 31, 164. It should be noted that the United States did not sign the final agreements made at Geneva in 1954. However, Washington participated in their drafting and agreed to abide by them.

[4]Walton, Cold War and Counterrevolution, p. 22.

[5]Ibid., p. 12.

[6]Hilsman, To Move A Nation, pp. 117-18.

[7]Ibid., pp. 118-19.

[8]Ibid., p. 121.

[9]David Wise and Thomas B. Ross, The Invisible Government, New York (1964), p. 149.

[10]Hilsman, To Move A Nation, p. 121.

[11]Ibid., p. 122. See also: Walton, Cold War and Counterrevolution, pp. 13-14, and Wise and Ross, The Invisible Government, p. 149.

[12]Walton, Cold War and Counterrevolution, p. 14. See also: Hilsman, To Move A Nation, p. 123.

[13]Walton, Cold War and Counterrevolution, p. 15. See also: Senator Gravel Edition. The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of United States Decisionmaking on Vietnam (1972), V, p. 259. Herein after referred to as Pentagon Papers.

[14]Wise and Ross, The Invisible Government, pp. 149-150.

[15]Pentagon Papers, V, p. 259.

[16]Walton, Cold War and Counterrevolution, p. 15.

[17]Wise and Ross, The Invisible Government, p. 150. See also: Pentagon Papers, V, p. 259, and Walton, Cold War and Counterrevolution, p. 16.

[18]Pentagon Papers, V, p. 259.

[19]Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 306. See also: Walton, Cold War and Counterrevolution, p. 17, Pentagon Papers, V, p. 259, and Wise and Ross, The Invisible Government, p. 150.

[20]Wise and Ross, The Invisible Government, p. 150.

[21]Hilsman, To Move A Nation, p. 125.

[22]Walton, Cold War and Counterrevoltuion, pp. 17-18.

[23]Wise and Ross, The Invisible Government, p. 151.

[24]Walton, Cold War and Counterrevolution, p. 18. See also: Pentagon Papers, V, p. 259.

[25]Wise and Ross, The Invisible Government, p. 151. See also: Hilsman, To Move A Nation, p. 125.

[27]Pentagon Papers, V, p. 260.

[28]Ibid., II, p. 464.

[29]Ibid., p. 22.

[30]Ibid., pp. 635-37.

[31]Ibid., pp. 636-37.

[32]Ibid., p. 337. See also Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 156.

[33]Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 156. See also: Pentagon Papers, II, p. 337.

[34]Hilsman, To Move A Nation, p. 151.

[35]Arthur J. Dommen, Conflict in Laos: The Politics of Neutralization, New York (1971), p. 188.

[36]Maxwell D. Taylor, Swords and Plowshares, New York (1972), p. 217.

[37]Dommen, Conflict in Laos, p. 188.

[38]Sorensen, Kennedy, p. 640.

[39]Charles A. Stevenson, The End of Nowhere: American Policy Toward Laos Since 1954, Boston (1971), pp. 130-32.

[40]Ibid., pp. 132-33.

[41]Public Papers, p. 16.

[42]Stevesnon, The End of Nowhere, p. 133.

[43]Chester Bowles, Promises to Keep: My Years in Public Life 1941-1969, New York (1971), p. 335.

[44]Stevenson, The End of Nowhere, pp. 134-35.

[45]Charles L. Markmann and Mark Sherwin, John F. Kennedy: A Sense of Purpose, New York (1961), pp. 150-57. See also: Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 309.

[46]Markmann and Sherwin, John F. Kennedy, p. 150.

[47]Ibid., pp. 151-52. See also: Wilfred G. Burchett, The Second Indochina War: Cambodia and Laos, New York (1970), p. 139.

[48]Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 309.

[49]Burchett, The Second Indochina War, pp. 136-37.

[50]Ibid., p. 137.

[51]Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 308.

[52]Stevenson, The End of Nowhere, p. 137.

[53]Ibid., p. 138.

[54]Ibid., p. 140.

[55]New York Times March 3, 1961, p. 1.

[56]Stevenson, The End of Nowhere, p. 140.

[57]Bowles, Promises to Keep, p. 336.

[58]Sorensen, Kennedy, p. 641. It was felt to be significant that Sorensen did not include a fifth alternative. At the time members of Kennedy's advisery staff were recommending and the President was seriously considering making a substantial troop commitment to Laos. By omitting this, Sorensen gave the impression that intervention in Laos during March was not being considered at the highest level of the government. He later included military intervention as a means to demonstrate Kennedy's resolve.

[59]Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 310.

[60]Sorensen, Kennedy, pp. 641-43.

[61]Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 310.

[62]Stevenson, The End of Nowhere, p. 143.

[63]Public Papers, p. 213.

[64]Stevenson, The End of Nowhere, p. 145.

[65]Public Papers, p. 213.

[66]Hilsman, To Move A Nation, p. 91.

[67]Public Papers, pp. 213-14.

[68]Ibid., p. 214.

[69]Sorensen, Kennedy, p. 643.

[70]Public Papers, p. 215.

[71]Dommen, Conflict in Laos, p. 190.

[72]"Laos: At The Brink," Newsweek, April 3, 1961, p. 21.

[73]Hilsman, To Move A Nation, p. 91.

[74]Public Papers, p. 214.

[75]Stevenson, The End of Nowhere, p. 147.

[76]Stebbins, The United States in World Affairs 1961, p. 197.

[77]U.S., Department of State, American Foreign Policy: Current Documents, 1961, Pubn. No. 7808 (1965), p. 941.

[78]Markmann and Sherwin, John F. Kennedy, pp. 159-60.

[79]Burchett, The Second Indochina War, p. 140.

[80]"JFK in the First Hundred Days," Newsweek, May 8, 1961, p. 22.

[81]Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 313.

[82]U.S., Department of State, Department of State Bulletin, 44, p. 689.

[83]Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 313.

[84]Ibid., p. 314. See also: Jonathan Mirsky and Stephen E. Stonefield, "The Nam Tha Crisis: Kennedy and the New Frontier on the Brink," Laos: War and Revolution, ed. by Nina S. Adams and Alfred W. McCoy, New York (1970), p. 161. On April 24 three American military advisers were captured by Kong Le at Vang Vieng when the city was overrun after Nosavan's Royal Laotian troops ran. The overt presence of the Americans had not improved the covert aid they had been giving previously. Walton, Cold War and Counterrevolution, p. 24.

[85]Nixon, "Cuba, Castro and John F. Kennedy," p. 291.

[86]Sorensen, Kennedy, p. 641.

[87]Markmann and Sherwin, John F. Kennedy, pp. 160-61. See also: Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 315.

[88]Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 315. See also: Stevenson, The End of Nowhere, p. 151.

[89]Stevenson, The End of Nowhere, pp. 152-53. Stevenson reported that on May 11 Kennedy agreed to the infiltration of agents into North Vietnam for sabotage and harassment purposes and the deployment of special South Vietnamese forces into southern Laos on intelligence and harassment missions. He also wrote that Kennedy authorized the use of American advisers, if required, in attacks near Tchepone. The Pentagon Papers reported that on May 11 NSAM 52 approved the May 6 Task Force report recommendation to "help the GVN increase border patrol and counter-insurgency capability through aerial surveillance and new technological devices . . .," II, p. 10.

[90]Public Papers, p. 10.

[91]Walton, Cold War and Counterrevolution, p. 25. See also: Mirsky and Stonefield, "The Nam Tha Crisis," p. 163.

[92]Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 317.

[93]Hilsman, To Move A Nation, pp. 132-35.

[94]Sorensen, Kennedy, p. 646.

[95]Walton, Cold War and Counterrevolution, p. 25.

[96]Dean Rusk, The Winds of Freedom: Selections from the Speeches and Statements of Secretary of State Dean Rusk, January 1961-August 1962, ed. by Ernest K. Lindley, Boston (1963), pp. 184-85.

[97]George Modelski, International Conference on the Settlement of the Laotian Question 1961-2, Canberra, Australia (1962), pp. 1-2.

[98]Hilsman, To Move A Nation, p. 28.

[99]Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 340.

[100]Stevenson, The End of Nowhere, pp. 153-54.

[101]Hilsman, To Move A Nation, p. 16.

[102]Sorensen, Kennedy, p. 639.

CHAPTER V: JOHN KENNEDY'S COMMITMENT TO VIETNAM

[1]Ronald Steel, Imperialists and Other Heroes: A Chronicle of the American Empire, New York (1971), pp. 392-94.

[2]U.S., Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, Viet-Nam, Far Eastern Series 116, Pubn. No. 6469 (1963), p. 10.

[3]Kennedy, The Strategy of Peace, p. 57.

[4]Claude Julien, America's Empire, trans. by Renaud Bruce, New York (1971), p. 243.

[5]George K. Tanham, et al., War Without Guns: American Civilians in Rural Vietnam, New York (1966), p. 11.

[6]John Galloway, The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, Rutherford, New Jersey (1970), pp. 29-35.

[7]Tanham, War Without Guns, p. 22.

[8]U.S., Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, Mutual Security in Action, Far Eastern Series 83, Pubn. No. 6869 (1959), p. 2.

[9]Chester L. Cooper, The Lost Crusade: America in Vietnam, New York (1970), p. 188.

[10]Robert Shaplen, The Lost Revolution: The U.S. in Vietnam, 1946-1966, New York (1966), p. 148.

[11]Pentagon Papers, II, pp. 25-27.

[12]Ibid., pp. 23-25.

[13]Ibid., pp. 30-32.

[14]Cooper, The Lost Crusade, pp. 186-88.

[15]Ambrose, Rise to Globolism, p. 276.

[16]Ibid., p. 277.

[17]Pentagon Papers, II, pp. 33-37.

[18]U.S., Department of State, Department of State Bulletin, 49, p. 164.

[19]U.S., Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, Viet-Nam: The Struggle for Freedom, Far Eastern Series 127, Pubn. No. 7724 (1964), p. 4.

[20]Pentagon Papers, pp. 43-44.

[21]Public Papers, p. 356.

[22]Pentagon Papers, pp. 48-49.

[23]U.S., Department of State, United States Treaties and Other International Agreements, Vol. VI, pt. 1. "Southeast Asia Collective Defense," TIAS No. 3170, Sept. 8, 1954, p. 83.

[24]Pentagon Papers, pp. 49-50.

[25]U.S., Department of State, Department of State Bulletin, 44, pp. 956-57.

[26]Ambrose, Rise to Globolism, p. 303.

[27]Pentagon Papers, pp. 55-59.

[28]Walton, Cold War and Counterrevolution, p. 169.

[29]Pentagon Papers, pp. 60-62.

[30]Ibid., p. 11.

[31]Ibid., p. 66.

[32]Sorensen, Kennedy, pp. 652-53.

[33]Pentagon Papers, pp. 67-68.

[34]Ibid., pp. 62-64.

[35]New York Times, July, 17, 1961, p. 2.

[36]New York Times, July, 18, 1961, p. 3.

[37]Pentagon Papers, pp. 71-72.

[38]Ibid., pp. 73-75.

[39]Ibid., pp. 77-79.

[40]Ibid., p. 79.

[41]Ibid., pp. 79-80.

[42]Public Papers, p. 660.

[43]New York Times, October 15, 1961, p. 30.

[44]Pentagon Papers, p. 82.

[45]Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Bitter Heritage: Vietnam and American Democracy, 1941-1966, Boston (1967), p. 24.

[46]Ambrose, Rise to Globalism, p. 304.

[47]Townsend Hoopes, The Limits of Intervention: An Inside Account of How the Johnson Policy of Escalation in Vietnam was Reversed, New York (1969), pp. 23-24.

[48]George M. Kahin and John W. Lewis, The United States in Vietnam, New York (1967), p. 129.

[49]Maxwell Taylor, Responsibility and Response, New York (1967), p. 26.

[50]Pentagon Papers, pp. 107-08.

[51]Ibid., pp. 108-09.

[52]Ibid., pp. 110-12.

[53]Ibid., p. 110.

[54]Ibid., p. 113.

[55]Ibid., pp. 121-22.

[56]Ibid., p. 125.

[57]Ambrose, Rise to Globalism, p. 304.

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DONALD DUDLEY MORGAN

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John F. Kennedy became President of the United States with the promise to bring a new spirit to the nation's foreign policies. On January 19, 1961, Kennedy met with outgoing President Dwight D. Eisenhower. During the session Eisenhower warned Kennedy that he would need to be prepared to respond to some critical situations which would arise during the coming months. Eisenhower particularly emphasized the "mess" that Kennedy would face in Laos. He also told Kennedy that Washington had been supporting an operation with the ultimate goal of overthrowing the Fidel Castro government in Cuba and encouraged him to continue and intensify this undertaking. These situations and others which developed during 1961 presented Kennedy with the opportunities to implement new policies and relax the tensions of the Cold War.

In 1961 four separate situations presented Kennedy opportunities to institute his promised changes. The first of these occurred in April when the Cuban Freedom Fighters failed in their attempted invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. The second incident came when Kennedy met with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev in Vienna, Austria, during June. The other two opportunities resulted from developments in Southeast Asia. The Laotian crisis that Eisenhower warned about became critical during the early months of 1961. During this period Kennedy chose to avoid a direct confrontation with the Communists by attending a fourteen-nation international conference on the future of Laos. He decided to make a commitment to the defense of the pro-American government of President Ngo Dinh Diem against insurgents in South Vietnam.

Kennedy's admirers claim that he possessed the abilities to learn from his mistakes and mature as President with each problem that he faced. Two of these, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., and Theodore Sorensen, claim

that Kennedy met each situation differently and developed the policies which would apply best to each. These claims were not completely true. Kennedy might have learned from his experiences, but if he did, he forgot these lessons later if they did not coincide with his concepts of the role the United States should pursue in the world. It was more likely, however, that Kennedy failed to comprehend these lessons just as he failed to heed some of the advice he received. An example of this was his disregard of the advice of French President Charles de Gaulle and Khrushchev not to become involved in a ground war against native guerillas in Southeast Asia.

The most important element in Kennedy's foreign policy was his concern for the image that his actions would present to the world. He was determined to prevent the spread of Communism while he increased the influence of the United States in the Third World. These factors played vital roles during the above listed situations.

Kennedy decided in favor of the Bay of Pigs invasion although he failed to commit the support which would insure the venture's success. In fact, he doomed the expedition by making adjustments in the military plan on the basis of political advice to ease the impact of the invasion on the countries of the Third World. After the invasion's failure, Kennedy, concerned that the world should not consider him weak and irresolute, presented a determined image. He maintained this image during his meetings with Khrushchev by adamantly refusing to indicate that the United States would even consider negotiations over the future status of Berlin. At the same time Kennedy warned that a misjudgement could lead to a possible direct confrontation between Washington and Moscow. If this should occur, Kennedy told Khrushchev, he was prepared

to go to any lengths, including nuclear war, to defend America's interests.

Kennedy selected different methods to obtain the same objectives in Southeast Asia. He agreed to seek a peaceful settlement of the Laotian problem through negotiations. But at the same time he threatened to intervene with American military forces if America's interests there were endangered. Kennedy was willing to negotiate about Laos but not about South Vietnam where he committed the nation to a course which would drag the United States deep into a quagmire from which it would take ten years to withdraw. Although Kennedy promised to pursue different foreign policies than Eisenhower had, he did not do so. Instead, he continued the containment policy in Europe and extended it to the Caribbean Sea and Southeast Asia in order to maintain the balance between American and Soviet influence. Kennedy sought opportunities to present an image of strength as the leader of a powerful nation.