

Kennedy's Foreign Policy in Vietnam: A Series of Decisions that Ultimately Limited Diplomatic Options

By Taoxi Xie

In my mind, the Vietnam War has always been a myth. Images of men, women, and children in agony made me ponder in silence. The immense loss of life and the annihilation of the economy and social order galvanized me to investigate the conflict further. From any perspective, Vietnam was a significant failure. Throughout this essay, as a social responsibility to prevent future wars, I will help enlightening what happened during Kennedy's administration with regards to the Vietnam war. In addition, I aspire to note the dramatic diplomatic change and consequence of such measures/decisions under the Kennedy Administration.

Originally, Vietnam was thought of as President Lyndon B. Johnson's war. It is undisputed that Johnson escalated the war efforts in Vietnam. However, the diplomatic changes that happened under President Kennedy further limited Johnson's diplomatic options in Vietnam. Fundamentally, the Vietnam War was a political war and simply based on American Liberalism. The American liberal justification for the war, that Americans rescued the Vietnamese people from misery and tyrannical rule, hardly presents the full picture. The realpolitik behind the Vietnam War is essentially the game of balance of power. From the start, President Kennedy saw Vietnam as a place of strategic importance in the battle against the Soviet Union. Hence, his ultimate objective was to ensure and protect the prestige of the American government.

My research commenced with extensive reading through different books that emphasized the history of the Vietnam War. I read zealously on JSTOR, as well as other academic journals, books, and national security memorandums. I found Karnow's *Vietnam: A History* informing on the details of the war's origins. Karnow also detailed discussion between high-level officials and

Kennedy over strategic decisions. *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* by Secretary McNamara provided further information on the heated disagreement on how to implement American policy. Other primary sources, such as Kennedy's speeches in Congress, his interviews, and newspapers at the time assisted me in building my arguments. I also reviewed multiple articles that explained the position of Vietnamese Communists and nationalist movements in this Southeast Asian country.. I tried to identify commonalities and differences in each article and identify key factors that contributed to expansion of U.S involvement in Vietnam.

I chose to present my project in the form of a paper. I believe an academic paper allows me to be comprehensive and erudite in displaying the origin of the Vietnam War. I formulated my outline chronologically and showed a progression of Vietnam policy in the Kennedy Administration. By the 1950s, the tension between the United States and the Soviet Bloc had deepened. Around the world, the ideological differences between Communism and Western democracy incited conflicts and power struggles through proxy fights. These proxy wars, including the Paraguayan Civil War, Korean War, and Algerian War, heightened the global tension and forced regional countries to align themselves with either the Soviet Union or the United States. This intensification of international frictions promoted the necessity for a novel American foreign policy to defeat the Soviet Regime. Kennedy's previous failure to impede Soviet presence in the Bay of Pigs Invasion and the Cuban Missile Crisis, further augmented the strategic significance of Vietnam. His political rhetoric, unwavering support for aid-packages and military equipment, and his lack of reliable local partnership in the South Vietnamese government restricted possible diplomatic options.

The connection between Vietnam and diplomacy is an engaging one. The debate between Kennedy and his cabinet members further revealed the difficulties and risks of implementing a grand diplomatic design. Significant strategic moves (etc. coup, regime change) involve significant levels of risk and might have caused catastrophic consequences. As seen in the Vietnam War, Kennedy's will to implement his policy, as well as his political rhetoric, commitment of aid packages, and his lack of regional partnership, eventually led to less diplomatic options.

John F. Kennedy: Ideology and Personal Image Before Presidency

Kennedy presented himself as a pragmatic idealist. Ideologically, he fell into the liberal wing of the Senate democrats. Kennedy consistently believed in the containment of communism.¹ In his mind, communism was a significant threat to Western societies. Although his record as a domestic lawmaker was hardly impressive, Kennedy was invested in foreign policy.² As a United States Senator, he repeatedly criticized the foreign policy of his predecessor, General Eisenhower, for being too passive in maintaining the balance of power.³ Even before Kennedy ran for president, he regarded Vietnam as a significant and necessary political conflict with communism. In an address at the Vietnam Luncheon in 1956, Kennedy further developed his diplomatic theory of Vietnam.⁴ He compared the American diplomatic policy in the world at

¹ John F. Kennedy, "JFK on the containment of Communism, 1952," *The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History*, accessed March 4, 2022, <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/jfk-containment-communism-1952>.

² Kent M. Beck, "The Kennedy Image: Politics, Camelot, and Vietnam," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 58, no. 1 (1974): 46, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4634927>.

³ William R. Hersch, "Kennedy," in *Images of Inherited War: Three American Presidents in Vietnam* (n.p.: Air UP, 2014), 37, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep13962>.

⁴ John F. Kennedy, "REMARKS OF SENATOR JOHN F. KENNEDY AT THE CONFERENCE ON VIETNAM LUNCHEON IN THE HOTEL WILLARD, WASHINGTON, D.C., JUNE 1, 1956," *John F. Kennedy Presidential*

the time as a “volunteer fire department.” As he noted, a fire department “rarely prevents fires.”⁵ As the metaphor makes clear, Kennedy hoped to go on the offensive against the Soviet Union. He saw communism as a long-term adversary and was determined to constrain it more ardently than his predecessor. Kennedy was willing to sacrifice significantly for a worthy gain.

He later expounded the infamous domino theory, according to which, Vietnam represented “the cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia, the keystone to the arch, the finger in the dike.” If, according to this theory, the “Red Tide of communism overflowed into Vietnam,” the region would succumb to Soviet interest. Therefore, he concluded, “America's stake in Vietnam, in her strength and in her security, is a very selfish one.”⁶ This domino theory indicated that the downfall of Vietnam would lead many others to be exposed to Communism. Though lacking any concrete evidence, his general proposition received the attention and support from the general public and congressional hardliners. His domino theory largely influenced the direction of American diplomacy on communism. The policy shifted from managing communism as an adversary to pursuing the containment of communism internationally.

Before Vietnam: Bay of Pigs and Cuban Missile Crisis

Kennedy encountered multiple diplomatic challenges, including the Pigs of Bay and the Cuban Missile Crisis. These two political predicaments further restricted Kennedy’s strategic imperative and inflated the gravity of Vietnam.

The Bay of Pigs, an operation under Kennedy intended to overthrow the Cuban government in 1961, failed disastrously and became a public humiliation for the Kennedy

Library and Museum, accessed March 4, 2022, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/archives/other-resources/john-f-kennedy-speeches/vietnam-conference-washington-dc-19560601>.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

administration. During this event, Kennedy exposed his inability to conduct inter-agency cooperation and his negligence in incorporating U.S Allies in decision making.⁷ His boldness diminished the moral superiority and legal structure of the United States.⁸ Though the Bay of Pigs was programmed by the CIA in the Eisenhower Administration, Kennedy's lack of follow through and his lack of familiarity with government structure contributed to the ultimate failure of this mission.⁹ Kennedy himself did not question the plan of invasion; his cabinet, including the State Department, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Secretary of Defense raised no objection to this plan. Inadequate debate regarding the Bay of Pigs essentially led to the failure of the mission. The plan underestimated Castro's power and alienated an historical ally of the United States. Castro consolidated his power further and communism prevailed over democracy in Cuba. The strategic blunder inadvertently promoted the growth of communism in Cuba.

The consequence of the previous political intervention emerged during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Essentially, the Soviets exploited Kennedy's recklessness in the Bay of Pigs. Following the alienation of the Cuban government, Nikita Khrushchev, First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, was able to reach an agreement with Castro to implement Soviet missiles as an effective deterrent to the United States.¹⁰ Kennedy was therefore partially responsible for the commencement of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Moreover, Kennedy dealt with the Cuban Missile Crisis dubiously. He misunderstood Khrushchev's military intention, as Kennedy thought Khrushchev's missile deployment in Cuba was an act of probing created by

⁷ Joshua H. Sandman, "Analyzing Foreign Policy Crisis Situations: The Bay of Pigs," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 16, no. 2 (1986): 315, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40574652>.

⁸ Sandman, "Analyzing Foreign," 315.

⁹ Ibid, 314.

¹⁰ "The Cuban Missile Crisis, October 1962," Department of State: Office Of the Historian, accessed March 6, 2022, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/cuban-missile-crisis>.

personal contempt.¹¹ However, the Russian leader's actual intention was to restrict the possibility of an American solicited missile attack on the Soviet Union and balance the strength of American missiles.¹² Furthermore, in a highly fluid situation, during which any miscommunication could possibly have led to nuclear warfare, Kennedy chose to backchannel the Soviets. Kennedy elected secret dealings for political purposes and misled the American public into believing that such a crisis could be managed.¹³ Though the Cuban Missile Crisis is considered a significant success of the Kennedy Administration, the crisis could have been prevented or mitigated through direct foreign protocols. Nevertheless, the apparent threat in the Cuban Missile Crisis, impugned Kennedy's political image and the safety of the American public. The threatening signals from communism forced Kennedy to contest and eradicate communism even further.

Both incidents proved the Soviet Union a valiant opponent on the global stage. The Cuban Missile Crisis and Bay of Pigs revealed immense Soviet influence globally. Kennedy's previous dealings with the Soviet Union failed to protect the prestige of the American government. Hence, Kennedy elevated the significance of Vietnam and converted this country into another front to challenge the spread of communism.

Vietnam: An Oppressive History of Colonial Rule

Due to immense opposition to the colonial rule of the French government, a potent insurgency arose in the 1950s. In this period, the Soviet Union sought to challenge the United

¹¹ Richard M. Pious, "The Cuban Missile Crisis and the Limits of Crisis Management," *Political Science Quarterly* 116, no. 1 (2001): 85-86, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2657821>.

¹² William J. Medland, "The Cuban Missile Crisis: Evolving Historical Perspectives," *The History Teacher* 23, no. 4 (1990): 438, <https://doi.org/10.2307/494397>.

¹³ Pious, "The Cuban," 104-105.

States globally, both ideologically and geo-politically. Many states neighboring Vietnam, such as China, fell into the Soviet bloc.¹⁴ This continuing surrender of influence in Indochina worried many in Washington. Widespread McCarthyism, for example, symbolized the increasing anxiety of U.S. policymakers regarding the loss of influence in Asian areas.¹⁵ Eventually, the United States bolstered the position of the French government not to suppress the Vietnamese people, but to engage the Soviet Union firmly in a geopolitical scenario. This insurgency, namely the Viet Minh (then Viet Cong), was led by Ho Chi Minh, a known communist operative. The rising of communism in North Vietnam raised grave concerns for the American government and many viewed the Viet Cong as a geopolitical success for the Soviet bloc.¹⁶ In 1955, the Geneva Conference eventually divided Vietnam in two. The north was largely controlled by communism and in the south, the American government bolstered the existing government to halt the spread of communism.¹⁷ Even though Vietnam was geologically divided, nationalist sentiment was prevalent. The South Vietnamese people eventually chose Ngo Dinh Diem as their leader who repudiated communism and colonialism.¹⁸ On the other hand, Ho Chi Minh communized and indoctrinated the north, building a communist state.¹⁹

Expansion of Vietnam Involvement

In 1961, when Kennedy became President, he firmly endorsed Ngo Dinh Diem, the President of South Vietnam. Diem, himself a devoted Catholic, seemed to be an ideal figure to

¹⁴ George W. Hopkins, "Historians and the Vietnam War: The Conflict over Interpretations Continues," *Studies in Popular Culture* 23, no. 2 (2000): 99, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23414548>.

¹⁵ George C. Herring, "The Cold War and Vietnam," *OAH Magazine of History* 18, no. 5 (2004): 18-19, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25163717>.

¹⁶ Herring, "The Cold," 19.

¹⁷ R. H. Spector, "French rule ended, Vietnam divided," *Britannica Encyclopedias*, accessed March 6, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War/French-rule-ended-Vietnam-divided>.

¹⁸ Vu Van Thai, "Vietnam: Nationalism under Challenge," *Vietnam Perspectives* 2, no. 2 (1966): 10-11, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30182492>.

¹⁹ Vu Van Thai, "Vietnam: Nationalism," 8-9.

propagate a new democracy and to defeat the dissemination of communism. Though Diem was reluctant to have U.S combat troops in South Vietnam, he requested more financial aid, increased military advisors, and more equipment for his increasing troops.²⁰ Later that year, General Taylor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, facilitated the process and suggested that the President ought to commit eight thousand combat troops to South Vietnam, disguised as logistic legions.²¹ McNamara, the Secretary of Defense, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff denied General Taylor's suggestion, critiquing his plan as inadequate. The concerns of the Pentagon turned out to be purely logistical. They believed stationing some 200,000 men was reasonable to combat Northern Vietnamese forces.²² The assessment of the Pentagon indicated rather strenuous warfare. Kennedy pushed back and he concurred with approving aid but rejected positioning of combat troops due to his fear of escalating war in Vietnam.²³ Nevertheless, Kennedy wanted to protect the prestige of the American government and to triumph in the Vietnam efforts. The United States committed over 2.1 billion dollars in economic assistance, not including the cost of increasing military advisors.²⁴ The commitment of military weapons and aid-packages further confined Kennedy into direct involvement in Vietnam.

Ironically, although Kennedy seemed to show restraint in exercising his power, he set the tone for the Vietnam War. Politically, the Kennedy administration retained its message of diminishing communism. In the case of Vietnam, Kennedy's rhetoric was somewhat unpragmatic, even concerning. His ideological statements eventually made his policy imperative

²⁰ Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Viking Press, 1984), 251.

²¹ Ibid, 252.

²² Ibid, 253.

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Wesley R. Fishel, "American Aid to Vietnam," *Current History* 49, no. 291 (1965): 298, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45311388>.

rather than malleable.²⁵ His stances, often fused with emotional arguments on moral righteousness of bolstering South Vietnam, made it difficult for him to avoid war. The cabinet pressed Kennedy's messaging even further. Many high-level officials, such as McNamara, General Taylor, and Vice President Johnson, visited South Vietnam as a way of signaling U.S support. Johnson even went as far as praising Diem as the reincarnation of Winston Churchill in 1961. Robert Kennedy, the Attorney General, declared in 1962 that "we are going to win."²⁶

Politically, had Kennedy shift his position on Vietnam, he would have devastated his domestic support. Many media supported the Kennedy oratory. One *New York Times* article in 1962 was even subtitled "American Prestige Is Staked on Keeping Communism from Taking Over in a Critical Area Where Battle Is Complex and Difficult."²⁷ His polling data revealed the effectiveness of Kennedy's messaging, who had an unprecedentedly high approval rating, averaging about 70%.²⁸

In addition to his awkward political stances, Kennedy lacked a reliable partner in South Vietnam. Though Kennedy bolstered Diem publicly, Diem was not a firm supporter of American policies as he often refused to carry out reforms or suggestions from the United States. Also, Diem's reputation and popularity gradually declined as he demonstrated an inability to administer or reform South Vietnam. His military forces were highly corrupt; officers who expressed loyalty to Diem received higher commissions and postings, regardless of their ability.

²⁵ Denise M. Bostdorff and Steven R. Goldzwig, "Idealism and Pragmatism in American Foreign Policy Rhetoric: The Case of John F. Kennedy and Vietnam," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (1994): 526-527, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27551281>.

²⁶ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 255.

²⁷ Homer Bigart, "A 'VERY REAL WAR' IN VIETNAM--AND THE DEEP U.S. COMMITMENT," *New York Times*, February 25, 1962, 121, accessed March 4, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/1962/02/25/archives/a-very-real-war-in-vietnamand-the-deep-us-commitment-as-the.html>.

²⁸ Hazel Gaudet Erskine, "The Polls: Kennedy as President," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1964): 334-336, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2747000>.

In the Al Cupac campaign of 1963, South Vietnamese forces were unable to combat the Vietcong, even with the assistance of American advisors.²⁹ His administration constituted a similar level of corruption. Diem openly favored privileged Catholic candidates loyalist for domestic office. Diem also made no efforts toward economic, social, or political reform.³⁰ As time progressed, he established an ineffective administration to counter North Vietnam and his³¹ priority was to ensure his authority in South Vietnam. The South Vietnamese forces fought only for the interest of Diem, not the interest of combating the communists. Diem essentially let the Americans engage in heavy warfare, keeping the rest of his forces to conserve his power and authority.³² Further, Diem's public reputation diminished in 1963 due to the continuing suppression of Buddhism by his military forces. Prominent Buddhist leaders and others who detested his policies openly protested against Diem.³³ Declining public support concerned the administration gravely and the possibility of a coup was discussed in the Kennedy Administration, but the cabinet was divided over this strategic possibility. General Taylor, Vice President Johnson, John McCone (CIA Director), and Secretary McNamara believed Diem was the only viable option.³⁴ McNamara also mentioned that he was unaware of any replacements.³⁵ On the other hand, Governor Harriman, Hillsman, and Ambassador Lodge (Ambassador to Vietnam) considered a coup necessary to mediate the Vietnam situation. Harriman expressed his concerns over Diem's inability to carry out American policies.³⁶ Ambassador Lodge conveyed

²⁹ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 258-262.

³⁰ Hersch, "Kennedy," 40.

³¹ Ibid

³² Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 259.

³³ Ibid, 279.

³⁴ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 288.

³⁵ Robert S. McNamara, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam (Vintage)* (n.p.: Vintage, 1996), 64.

³⁶ Ibid, 64.

that Diem was unwilling to follow Kennedy's instructions.³⁷ The Ambassador believed that no further efforts could be made in Vietnam with Diem, as he noted that "war cannot be won under a Diem Administration."³⁸ Eventually, the US government consented to a coup, agreeing not to interfere with it on Diem's behalf. General Minh, who served under Diem, overthrew, and assassinated Diem, leaving the circumstance in South Vietnam even more unpredictable.³⁹

Other episodes revealed Kennedy's reluctance. It appeared that Kennedy had not made up his mind on war. He even sanctioned or acknowledged a formal strategic exploration on the withdrawal of the U.S military in Vietnam in 1965.⁴⁰ However, Kennedy elaborated his concerns over cutting troop levels if the military situation in Vietnam worsened.⁴¹ Furthermore, the memorandum only concretely withdrew a thousand U.S. troops, a drop in the bucket compared to sixteen thousandths deployed.⁴² The memorandum could simply be a political strategy to deal with political repercussions. Kennedy further elaborated on his concerns about the Vietnam challenge in an interview in 1963: "We can't expect these countries to do everything the way we want them to do. They have their own interests, their own personalities, their own tradition. We can't make everyone want to go in our image. In addition, we have ancient struggles between countries. . . . We can't make the world over, but we can influence the

³⁷ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 288-289.

³⁸ Ibid, 289.

³⁹ Ibid, 311.

⁴⁰ Bundy McGeorge, "National Security Action Memoranda [NSAM]: NSAM 263, South Vietnam," *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum*, last modified October 11, 1963, accessed March 4, 2022, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKNSF/342/JFKNSF-342-007>.

⁴¹ Marc J. Selverstone, "It's a Date: Kennedy and the Timetable for a Vietnam Troop Withdrawal," *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 3 (2010): 493-494, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24915895>.

⁴² "MILITARY ADVISORS IN VIETNAM: 1963," *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum*, accessed March 4, 2022, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/education/teachers/curricular-resources/high-school-curricular-resources/military-advisors-in-vietnam-1963>.

world.”⁴³ Though Kennedy had appeared adamant in support of combating the expansion of communism, he stressed his concerns over the deployment of military means as an ultimate resolve on the Vietnam issue.

Nevertheless, the enlargement of military presence and aid packages, Kennedy’s resolute elocation on Vietnam, and lack of local partnership in South Vietnamese government, boxed him into a difficult predicament to deliberate between success and reasonable efforts in Vietnam.

Conclusion:

In the final analysis, the failure to safeguard the prestige of the American government during the Cuban Missile Crisis and Bay of Pigs induced a greater strategic magnitude in Vietnam. Fundamentally, Kennedy utilized Vietnam as another front to challenge the spread of communism. In the end, the inadequacy of regional partnerships between South Vietnam and the U.S government, Kennedy’s substantial commitment of U.S equipment and military advisors, as well as his political rhetoric, further contributed to the strategic limitations in the prospect of Vietnam.

⁴³"TRANSCRIPT OF NBC BROADCAST WITH CHET HUNTLEY, 9 SEPTEMBER 1963," *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum*, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKPOF/046/JFKPOF-046-032>.

Appendix A



Thich Quang Duc, a prominent Buddhist who chose self-immolation to protest the repressive policy of the Diem Administration. This extreme behavior revealed the aversion toward the Diem regime.

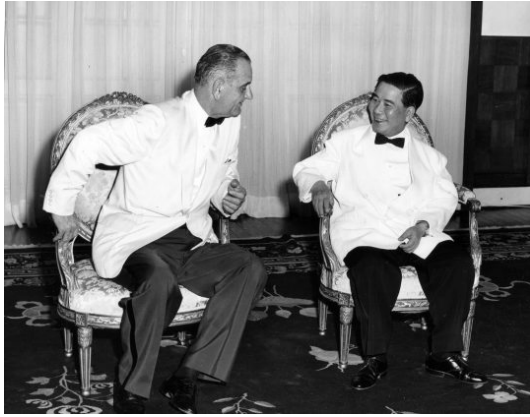
"Self-immolation of Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc in protest during the Vietnam War." *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War/The-conflict-deepens#/media/1/628478/244365>.

Appendix B



In 1963, President Kennedy met with Gen. Taylor and Secretary McNamara to discuss the Vietnam issue in the Oval Office.

"MEETING WITH SECRETARY OF DEFENSE ROBERT S. MCNAMARA, and GEN. MAXWELL D. TAYLOR, CHAIRMAN, JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF (JCS), 11:00AM," *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library*, accessed March 1, 2022, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/assetviewer/archives/JFKWHP/1963/Month%2010/Day%2002/JFKWHP-1963-10-02-C>.



In 1961, Vice President Lyndon B Johnson met with South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem at Independence Palace, Saigon. Lyndon B Johnson supported Diem adamantly and praised Diem as the reincarnation of Sir Winston Churchill.

Breen, Tom. "Johnson and Diem." *UConn Today*. Last modified May 4, 2020. Accessed February 25, 2022. <https://today.uconn.edu/2020/05/uconn-historian-south-vietnam-archives-provide-new-insights-war/johnson-diem/#>.

Appendix C-1



In January 1966, women and children hid in a muddy stream to escape fierce Viet Cong fire at Bao Trai, 20 miles from Saigon. The living conditions for women and children were horrifying.

Horst Faas, "35 years after the fall: The Vietnam War in pictures," *National Broadcasting Company*, last modified April 29, 2010, accessed March 1, 2022,

<https://www.nbcnews.com/slideshow/news/35-years-after-the-fall-the-vietnam-war-in-pictures-36859810>.

Appendix C-2



An American soldier endeavoring to protect Vietnamese civilians by transporting them elsewhere.

George C. Herring, "How Not to 'Win Hearts and Minds,'" *New York Times*, last modified September 19, 2017, accessed March 1, 2022,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/19/opinion/vietnam-war-americans-culture.html>.

Annotated Bibliography

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Bigart, Homer. "A 'VERY REAL WAR' IN VIETNAM--AND THE DEEP U.S.

COMMITMENT." *New York Times*, February 25, 1962, 121. Accessed March 4, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/1962/02/25/archives/a-very-real-war-in-vietnamand-the-deep-us-commitment-as-the.html>.

This is an article that discusses the prospect of the Vietnam War in 1962. Though the living conditions and the conflicts are difficult, the article still expresses the view that the Vietnam War is strategically important. This prevalent view receives a wide range of support from the general public and the Kennedy Administration.

Breen, Tom. "Johnson and Diem." *UConn Today*. Last modified May 4, 2020. Accessed February 25, 2022. <https://today.uconn.edu/2020/05/uconn-historian-south-vietnam-archives-provide-new-insights-war/johnson-diem/#>.

Vice President Johnson met with Diem in his palace. He even praised Diem as the reincarnation of Sir Winston Churchill.

Faas, Horst. "35 years after the fall: The Vietnam War in pictures." *National Broadcasting Company*. Last modified April 29, 2010. Accessed March 1, 2022.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/slideshow/news/35-years-after-the-fall-the-vietnam-war-in-pictures-36859810>.

This picture shows the difficulty and hardship of war. Women were forced to stay in a muddy canal to escape fierce fire from the Viet Cong.

Herring, George C. "How Not to 'Win Hearts and Minds.'" *New York Times*. Last modified September 19, 2017. Accessed March 1, 2022.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/19/opinion/vietnam-war-americans-culture.html>.

This picture shows an American soldier rescuing a woman and her children.

Johnson, Lyndon B. "Address at Johns Hopkins University: 'Peace Without Conquest.'" *The American Presidency Project*. Accessed March 4, 2022.

<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-johns-hopkins-university-peace-without-conquest>.

President Johnson expresses his personal view on Vietnam to students at Johns Hopkins University. He believes that Americans have a national responsibility to help the South Vietnamese to protect their democracy and home. Johnson utilizes his rhetoric to try and persuade the American public that the Vietnam War is necessary and worthy.

Karnow, Stanley. *Vietnam: A History*. New York: Viking Press, 1984.

Karnow offers an historical insight into the beginning and progression of Vietnam through a journalist's perspective. Karnow includes substantial details regarding the discussion of diplomatic decisions by high level officials as well as how the Vietnam War unfolds locally in Vietnam. Karnow reveals the thinking of the Kennedy Administration on Vietnam policy as well as the common distrust of the South Vietnamese people toward the Diem Administration.

Kennedy, John F. "JFK on the containment of Communism, 1952." *The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History*. Accessed March 4, 2022.

<https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/jfk-containment-communism-1952>.

This handwritten note by President Kennedy reflects his anti-communist view when he was a United States Senator. He concludes Communism as the enemy of the West and the West must eradicate Communism by balance of power. His view on Communism sheds light on why Kennedy essentially adopts a hardliner strategy on foreign policy.

Kennedy, John F. "REMARKS OF SENATOR JOHN F. KENNEDY AT THE CONFERENCE ON VIETNAM LUNCHEON IN THE HOTEL WILLARD, WASHINGTON, D.C., JUNE 1, 1956." *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum*. Accessed March 4, 2022. <https://www.jfklibrary.org/archives/other-resources/john-f-kennedy-speeches/vietnam-conference-washington-dc-19560601>. Kennedy's remark at the conference confirms the infamous domino theory, in which the fall of Vietnam will lead to the collapse of Asia to Communism. His political rhetoric gains substantial public support and further limits other diplomatic possibilities in Vietnam.

McGeorge, Bundy. "National Security Action Memoranda [NSAM]: NSAM 263, South Vietnam." *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum*. Last modified October 11, 1963. Accessed March 4, 2022. <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKNSF/342/JFKNSF-342-007>. National Security Action Memorandum 263 formally authorizes the withdrawal of 1000 U.S troops in Vietnam. This memorandum does reflect on a level of President Kennedy's reservation about a full-scale war.

McNamara, Robert S. *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (Vintage). N.p.: Vintage, 1996. Secretary of Defense(1961-1968) McNamara contemplates the reasons why the United States failed in Vietnam. His accounts include vivid discussion between President Kennedy, Gov. Harriman, Secretary of State Dean Rusk and others on the subject of Vietnam policy. His personal account even consists of the discussion on whether to sanction the coup of Diem in 1963.

"MEETING WITH SECRETARY OF DEFENSE ROBERT S. MCNAMARA, and GEN. MAXWELL D. TAYLOR, CHAIRMAN, JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF (JCS), 11:00AM." *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library*. Accessed March 1, 2022. <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKWHP/1963/Month%2010/Day%2002/JFKWHP-1963-10-02-C>. President Kennedy meets with Gen. Taylor and Secretary McNamara to discuss the Vietnam conflict and future vision of policy during a meeting.

"Self-immolation of Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc in protest during the Vietnam War." *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War/The-conflict-deepens#/media/1/628478/244365>.

A Vietnamese monk self-immolates to protest the repressive Diem government. This shows the unpopularity of the Diem Administration among the public.

"TRANSCRIPT OF NBC BROADCAST WITH CHET HUNTLEY, 9 SEPTEMBER 1963." *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum*.

<https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKPOF/046/JFKPOF-046-032>.

Kennedy expresses his concern over the interview with Huntley. He still believes that the Vietnam War is fundamentally the war of South Vietnamese people, not the American people. Though he is restrained in sending in the U.S military, he considers a certain magnitude of intervention necessary.

Secondary Sources

Beck, Kent M. "The Kennedy Image: Politics, Camelot, and Vietnam." *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 58, no. 1 (1974): 45-55. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4634927>.

The article articulates the perplex Kennedy image through many perspectives.(etc. historians, politicians) This paper also discusses the connection between Kennedy and the Vietnam War.

Bostdorff, Denise M., and Steven R. Goldzwig. "Idealism and Pragmatism in American Foreign Policy Rhetoric: The Case of John F. Kennedy and Vietnam." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (1994): 515-30. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27551281>.

This article analyzes Kennedy rhetoric during Vietnam. Though Kennedy deems himself a pragmatist, his political rhetoric is sometimes fused with idealist pledge and argument. However, Kennedy is able to largely adopt a certain level of practicality into his political rhetoric.

"The Cuban Missile Crisis, October 1962." Department of State: Office Of the Historian. Accessed March 6, 2022. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/cuban-missile-crisis>.

The State Department offers an official account of the Cuban Missile Crisis. The threat from Cuba is quite real. Kennedy struggles to understand Khrushchev's strategic intention. Nevertheless, Kennedy recognizes the immense danger of this crisis.

Erskine, Hazel Gaudet. "The Polls: Kennedy as President." *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1964): 334-42. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2747000>.

This is a poll by Gallup Poll for President Kennedy over his presidency. Kennedy receives a tremendous amount of approval rating; his average approval rating is about 70%.

Fishel, Wesley R. "American Aid to Vietnam." *Current History* 49, no. 291 (1965): 294-99. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45311388>.

This article delves into the specific of American Aid to Vietnam during the Vietnam War. This article states the strategic objective of American Aids. Furthermore, this article analyzes the progress and failure of the American Aids during the Diem Administration.

Herring, George C. "The Cold War and Vietnam." *OAH Magazine of History* 18, no. 5 (2004): 18-21. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25163717>.

This article encapsulates the history of the Vietnam War from WWII to the Vietnam War. The article connects the domino theory as well as the prevalent fear of the spread of Communism to the beginning of the Vietnam War. The War escalated under President Johnson and ended at the Ford presidency.

Hersch, William R. "Kennedy:." In *Images of Inherited War: Three American Presidents in Vietnam*, 33-68. N.p.: Air UP, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep13962.9>.

This chapter of the book discusses Kennedy's relationship with the Vietnam War and his foreign policy preference.

Hopkins, George W. "Historians and the Vietnam War: The Conflict over Interpretations Continues." *Studies in Popular Culture* 23, no. 2 (2000): 99-108.

This article compiles evolving perspectives of historians on the Vietnam issue. Some say Kennedy's hubris eventually led to the Vietnam War. Some claims the containment objective of Communism caused the Vietnam War. This shows the complexity of the Vietnam War by showing competing visions of interpretations on the Vietnam conflict.

Medland, William J. "The Cuban Missile Crisis: Evolving Historical Perspectives." *The History Teacher* 23, no. 4 (1990): 433-47. <https://doi.org/10.2307/494397>.

This article illustrates the strategic confusion from the American and Soviet perspective. The article analyzes Soviet and American diplomatic challenges and lack of mutual understanding on the Cuban Missile Crisis.

"MILITARY ADVISORS IN VIETNAM: 1963." *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum*. Accessed March 4, 2022.

<https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/education/teachers/curricular-resources/high-school-curricular-resources/military-advisors-in-vietnam-1963>.

The article describes the progression or the history of military advisors from 1960 to 1963. The number of military advisors soars over the period of three years.

Pious, Richard M. "The Cuban Missile Crisis and the Limits of Crisis Management."

Political Science Quarterly 116, no. 1 (2001): 81-105.

<https://doi.org/10.2307/2657821>.

This article critiques Kennedy's position and handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis. This article argues that Kennedy blatantly sacrificed his moral responsibility by not making the term public and making an impression that a crisis could be managed.

Sandman, Joshua H. "Analyzing Foreign Policy Crisis Situations: The Bay of Pigs."

Presidential Studies Quarterly 16, no. 2 (1986): 310-16.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40574652>.

This article delineates flaws in Kennedy's approach to the Bay of Pigs. The author includes lack of inter-agency communication, following through and neglect of international law and moral position of the United States.

Silverstone, Marc J. "It's a Date: Kennedy and the Timetable for a Vietnam Troop Withdrawal." *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 3 (2010): 485-95.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/24915895>.

This article discusses the National Security Memorandum 263 and possible interpretations over the effect of this memo. This article incorporates details and recording to reveal Kennedy and his advisor's thoughts on the withdrawal of troops in Vietnam.

Spector, R. H. "French rule ended, Vietnam divided." Britannica Encyclopedias. Accessed March 6, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War/French-rule-ended-Vietnam-divided>.

This britannica article discusses the colonial history of Vietnam, which induces a wide range of insurgency and nationalism to the French colonial rule. Later, the Geneva convention in 1954 which divided Vietnam into South Vietnam and North Vietnam.

Vu Van Thai. "Vietnam: Nationalism under Challenge." *Vietnam Perspectives* 2, no. 2 (1966): 3-12. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30182492>.

This article outlines the history of nationalism over the modern history of Vietnam. Nationalism rose from the early 1930s to the end of WWII. In the

1950s, Ho Chi Minh propagated mass indoctrination of Communism in North Vietnam, while prestige nationalism spread in South Vietnam.