

THE INFLUENCE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ON THE  
EISENHOWER ADMINISTRATION'S DECISION TO  
DIRECTLY INTERVENE IN VIETNAM

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army  
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by

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## ABSTRACT

THE INFLUENCE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ON THE EISENHOWER ADMINISTRATION'S DECISION TO DIRECTLY INTERVENE IN VIETNAM, by Jason A. Henderson, 126 pages.

After World War II the United States (U.S.) struggled to counter communist expansion by establishing a world order that fostered capitalism. Key to success in the Asian-Pacific region was rebuilding the Japanese economy as a capitalist power. Toward that end, the U.S. indirectly supported the French during the First Indochina War to recolonize and take advantage of the area's raw materials. The French failed and agreed in the Geneva Accords to partition the country with a goal of reunifying North and South Vietnam. The U.S. realized the Viet Minh would dominate and gain control of the country providing a communist victory in the region. Unwilling to accept this, the U.S. pressured Emperor Bao Dai to install Ngo Dinh Diem as Premier of South Vietnam. This was based in part on Diem and his family's Catholic heritage, which led to pressure from leaders in the U.S. who were either Catholic or sympathetic to the Catholic Church. Ultimately, influence from the Vietnamese Catholic Church, the American Catholic Church, and the Vatican would become a factor in the foreign policy decisions by the Eisenhower Administration as they related to Vietnam. These decisions led to direct involvement in Vietnam and eventually the Vietnam War.

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I would like to thank Dr. DiMarco for his guidance during this project. If it were not for his help, I would have either 300 pages of blather or be staring at a blank computer screen. Mr. Ken Gott of the Combat Studies Institute deserves my thanks for not only being a great mentor, but also for being eager to help in a timely manner. Also, I would like to extend a special thanks to Dr. Wert of the Kansas City Art Institute for reintroducing me to American History. Lastly, I would like to thank Mr. Ken Mortimer of the Veterans Administration for his ability to help me understand what exactly I was trying to say. America is lucky to have Ken helping our veterans.

At the risk of sounding cliché, without my wife's help, this project would have never even begun.

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## ACRONYMS

CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
NSC	National Security Council
OSS	Office of Strategic Services
SEATO	South East Asia Treaty Organization
U.S.	United States

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In the Preamble of the Constitution of the United States (U.S.), providing for the common defense is one of the foundational roles of government.<sup>1</sup> Carl von Clausewitz famously says that war is a continuation of policy by another method and within that, the prosecution of war is a political tool.<sup>2</sup> This underscores the importance of recognizing influence from a third party on a country's creation and application of foreign policy. The state's ability to adequately achieve its desired foreign policy goals relating to the common defense can be altered by an outside actor's influence on policy creation or implementation. Toward understanding this issue in American history, this research examines the Catholic Church's influence on the foreign policy decision of the Eisenhower Administration to directly intervene in the conflict in Vietnam.

In his book *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith*, which focuses on religion as an influence in American foreign policy, author Andrew Preston closes the first paragraph of the book by saying, "It is a logical assumption: few would argue that religion has played a consistently important role in American life, for better or worse."<sup>3</sup> It is a logical assumption this would be a historical fact however, it is less obvious as the foreign policy

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<sup>1</sup>National Archives of the United States (Washington, DC), Charters of Freedom The Declaration of Independence 1776, The Constitution of the United States 1787, the Bill of Rights 1791.

<sup>2</sup>Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 87.

<sup>3</sup>Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012).



process is unfolding, that religious influence might be playing a role. For this reason it is important for leaders responsible for developing and applying foreign policy to understand the relationship between national interests and the interests of religious organizations. Once this is understood, one can identify when influence is being applied toward a particular foreign policy issue.

In post 9/11 America, religion in conflict discussions often revolves around Islam and the Global War on Terror. There is little recent scholarship on the relationship of religion and state in America's history, particularly in regards to war. As a constitutionally secular nation, the concept that religion plays a role in committing American military power abroad is unfamiliar and unsettling. Andrew Preston's work provides an insightful overview of the overarching context of religious influence in American foreign policy, with a brief focus on Vietnam. This research complements Preston's efforts by providing a detailed look at America's march toward Vietnam and whether the Catholic Church or Catholicism influenced that progression.

Whether one believes religion should or should not play a role in American politics is a separate issue, but an inward look at an American experience where religion and foreign policy interact is important for three reasons: it highlights that religion can play a role in U.S. foreign policy creation regardless of the secular nature of the government; it underscores the importance of understanding the holistic picture encompassing a foreign policy issue; when incorporating religious goals might be synergistic or detrimental to U.S. interests; and it calls attention to the use of religious leaders in a practical manner when a policy is being implemented.

America's involvement in Vietnam illustrates the importance of religious influence in U.S. foreign policy. Any research into American entry into the Vietnam War must start with a thorough examination of Vietnamese history. Looking at the history of the country provides the setting in which future involvement will take place. The culture of the people of Vietnam is based on this background and becomes a key consideration for any Western country considering involvement in Vietnam. Of particular importance and emphasized in this research is an examination of the history of French efforts in Vietnam because it explains how the U.S. started down a very slippery slope that would ultimately lead to participation in the bloody conflict.

The history of Vietnam establishes the context and provides the backdrop for the Eisenhower Administration's decision to directly intervene in the war. Within that setting, it is critical to examine the policy creation process of the administration and its effort to fully understand communism so it can produce options for containment. The differences in containment policy between the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations show the evolution of that policy and the administrations' attempts at gaining a better understanding of the evolving global landscape. Particular attention must be paid to Eisenhower's policy and how it changed from Truman's. How Eisenhower implements containment is central to the actions in Vietnam because it shapes the way in which the Catholic Church could apply pressure to meet Church goals for the region. The research describes the evolution of policy from the attempts to create and support regional security pacts in South Asia, to full implementation of Eisenhower's "Basic National Security Policy" approved in October 1953, and often referred to as the "New Look."

Eisenhower's Basic National Security Policy makes it clear that, at least initially, economics were considered the best method to counter communist expansion in Vietnam backed up by the threat of massive military retaliation. To do this and put this version of containment theory into practice required coordinated economic policies in the U.S. and in South Vietnam. In Vietnam, the economic efforts were based on land development programs that were subsidized by American dollars and outlined by American advisors to attempt to stimulate South Vietnamese economic growth. These policies were the foundation for all subsequent anti-communist activities because capitalism and communism were considered mutually exclusive.

Economic policy provided the framework for the anti-communist effort, which then provided the opportunities for the Catholic Church to influence the Eisenhower Administration. Discovering the linkages between the Church and the Diem Administration and how that affected the actions and decisions in South Vietnam was key to this influence. The linkages directly between the Church and the Eisenhower Administration are also important. There were three links between Diem's government and the Catholic Church: the first was the Ngo family's ingrained Catholic mindset; the second was the massive emigration of Vietnamese Catholics from North to South Vietnam; and the third was the Church's shared views with the Diem Administration, regarding Vietnam's future. Examining these links in detail brings to light the efforts of the Church to assert influence on the Diem Administration and Ngo family regarding communism.

The Catholic Church was also heavily engaged with the Eisenhower Administration regarding foreign policy. Two linkages with the Catholic Church had a

powerful influence on the administration, particularly when combined with the increase in power of the Catholic vote: the Church's view of communism and the immense political influence the Church had in U.S. politics. These two links into Eisenhower policy clearly show that the Vatican wanted direct U.S. intervention in Vietnam to support its own struggles with communism.

The history of Vietnam, early Cold War U.S. foreign policy, the U.S. and South Vietnamese political relationship, combined with anti-communist efforts all united to shape the general situation in favor of the Catholic Church. Feeling the sting of communist expansion as much or more than any secular capitalist country, the Church needed a method to counter its spread. By recognizing the opportunities presented by the Diem and Eisenhower Administrations, the Church took advantage and applied as much influence as it could bring to bear in South Vietnam and the U.S. Ultimately, this influence contributed to the Eisenhower Administration's decision to directly intervene in South Vietnam to stop the spread of communism in the region.

To answer the thesis and through the course of the research several sources provided insight that is worthy of mention. When researching the history of Vietnam the most authoritative source was Ronald J. Cima's, *Vietnam: A Country Study*. This work was instrumental in painting the picture of Vietnam through April 1975, and contributed greatly to the understanding of the Vietnamese cultural view of outsiders. The second book that was helpful in gaining an understanding of the French efforts in Indochina was *The Emancipation of French Indochina*, by Donald Lancaster. The book clearly and concisely captured the key elements of the French occupation that became germane to the U.S.'s involvement in the region. Complimenting the work of Lancaster is *The Struggle*

*for Indochina*, by Ellen Hammer. This book was important to gain an understanding of the Vietnamese nationalism that had simmered throughout its history but began to boil during the World War II occupation. It provided a clear backstory for the French failure that preceded American direct involvement. Additionally, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* by Fredrik Logevall was an excellent source in gaining an understanding of how the U.S. efforts in Vietnam tied into the previous effort by the French.

The history of the country established the environmental context in which American foreign policy was applied and a few works were helpful to understand that foreign policy. First and foremost are the works of George Kennan. Both the “Long Telegram” and “The Sources of Soviet Conduct” present a holistic view of what communism was understood to be and what exactly it was that the U.S. would have to counter. Not only did Kennan’s work influence the political leadership as the Cold War heated up, but it also provided the foundation for understanding the pillars of containment philosophy. The book *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War* and the article, “Was the Truman Doctrine a Real Turning Point?” by John Lewis Gaddis, were also important to understanding the shifting of the containment policies. Gaddis started with Truman’s asymmetric approach under the influence of Kennan, then highlighted the Truman shift to a symmetric approach under the influence of Paul Nitze, from there Gaddis explored Eisenhower’s New Look compromise, where Eisenhower attempted to use all instruments of national power backed up by military threat. Within the writings, Gaddis provided great insight

into the arguments of the time and how they played out on the global stage. This was especially helpful in understanding the application of containment policy to Vietnam.

Because of Eisenhower's adoption of the New Look and the increase reliance on an economic defense against communist expansion, James M. Carter's work titled, *Inventing Vietnam: The United States and State Building, 1954-1968* is an important source. This book looks in-depth at the economic and bureaucratic efforts to establish South Vietnam as a stable country. The book also provides a holistic view of the economic development and how the Diem Administration and American advisors attempted to use economic successes for political gain. Also, William Bredo's article, "Agrarian Reform in Vietnam: Vietcong and Government of Vietnam Strategies in Conflict" provides details and facts that assist in understanding the broad themes of the two countries' mutual focus on economics. Bredo underscores the initial importance of the land development program to spur economic activity by telling the story of the Diem-U.S. attempts at reform and also the communists' attempts at land reform through the Viet Cong. Bredo's details combined with Carter's explanation of the attempted comprehensive efforts of economic policy as an instrument of stability and power, make clear the foundation of the U.S. and South Vietnamese policy relationship.

Seth Jacobs provides the most comprehensive review of Ngo Dinh Diem and the Deim Administration in his two books, *Cold War Mandarin: Ngo Dinh Diem and the Origins of America's War in Vietnam, 1950-1963* and *America's Miracle Man in Vietnam: Ngo Dinh Diem, Religion, Race, and U.S. Intervention in Southeast Asia*. Both books provided a detailed account of the Ngo family that makes it easy to understand the power of Catholicism in their life. Additionally, Jacobs's focus on Diem himself greatly

assisted in the research and understanding of how the U.S. aided Diem in his rise to power. Also very helpful was the book *The Last of the Mandarins: Diem of Vietnam*, by Anthony Trawick Bouscaren. It too provided details that assisted in understanding a larger picture of Diem, his family, and his administration.

Regarding the pressure on the Eisenhower Administration by Cardinal Francis Spellman, the biography *The American Pope: The Life and Times of Francis Cardinal Spellman*, by John Cooney was a valuable source. Cooney presented the personal details of Spellman's rise to power and how that power fit and shaped the American political and social scene of the time. Cooney also detailed how Spellman's power in the U.S. kept him tied into the Vatican and is a de facto ambassador. Sherman Adams, who was Eisenhower's Chief of staff for over five years, filled in the details of the personal and professional interaction between John Foster Dulles and Eisenhower in his book *Firsthand Report: The Story of the Eisenhower Administration*. This helped understand the manner in which Eisenhower managed his administration regarding foreign policy and Dulles's place within Eisenhower's system. Ronald Pruessen, in his book, *John Foster Dulles: The Road to Power*, provided the details on Dulles that illustrated how he functioned within the administration and how he acted as the Secretary of State. The book is the key to understanding Dulles's religious upbringing and the role that religion played in shaping his life. Finally, Dulles himself helped the understanding of the religious context of American foreign policy of the 1950s in his book, *War or Peace*. The book clearly explained Dulles's attitude on spirituality within policy realms and offers insights into why the inclusion of spirituality was needed for long-term global security.

The book also clearly conveyed Dulles's views on communism after World War II and provided Dulles's rationale for stopping it.



## CHAPTER 2

### BACKGROUND

Vietnam is a country located in the South East Asian Indochinese Peninsula, a historical trade route, with a history of resisting outside influence for centuries. As a result, the country developed an eclectic mix of cultures, languages, and nationalities within its borders. After hundreds of battles defending itself from outside conquerors in dozens of wars and multiple internal uprisings, the country began to become stable around 1800 when Gia Long established the Nguyen Dynasty.<sup>4</sup>

During the Nguyen Dynasty the European countries began to see the importance of Vietnam in terms of trade with China. By the middle of the nineteenth century the Portuguese, British, Spanish, and French were all actively competing for a larger share in the commercial enterprises of Asia.<sup>5</sup> These external commercial factors and internal unrest provided an opportunity in Vietnam for the European powers to invade.<sup>6</sup>

The early commercial exploration brought the introduction of Catholicism to the area by a small number of French and Spanish, who were the first known European missionaries. They came to Vietnam with Portuguese merchants in 1535, probably while

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<sup>4</sup>For a detailed description of Vietnam history prior to 1800, see: Ronald J. Cima, *Vietnam: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: The Federal Research Division, 1989); William S. Turley, *The Second Indochina War* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009).

<sup>5</sup>Frances FitzGerald, *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972), 51.

<sup>6</sup>R. E. M. Irving, *The First Indochina War: French and American Policy, 1945-54* (London: C. Helm, 1975), 9.

travelling the sea routes of the Silk Road.<sup>7</sup> In 1615, Genovese Busomi and Diego de Carvalho established the first official Catholic Mission in Central Vietnam. After a few years, the most important missionary became Alexander de Rhodes, who came to Vietnam in 1624.<sup>8</sup> Rhodes was a skillful linguist and within months had learned the language, which allowed him to preach directly to large audiences and facilitated in converting and ultimately baptizing large numbers of Vietnamese.<sup>9</sup> Eventually Rhodes created a Romanic script for the Vietnamese language that developed into the predominant language of the elites.<sup>10</sup>

Rhodes's efforts become significant to Vietnam in the future, specifically regarding the U.S. war with communist North Vietnam. The Catholic Mission suffered episodic setbacks over time and was expelled from Vietnam on more than one occasion. However, the perseverance of the members paid off, in the mid-eighteenth century a handful were invited to serve in the court of the Nguyen Lord, Chua Vo Vuong, in various advisory positions.<sup>11</sup> Not only were the Jesuits gaining access within ruling circles in the South with the Nguyen court, but also in the North with the Trinh Lords.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Laura Szumanski Steel, "In the Name of the Father: The American Catholic Church and United States Foreign Policy During the Vietnam War" (Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 2005), 67.

<sup>8</sup>Nhung Tuyet Tran and Anthony Reid, eds., *Viet Nam: Borderless Histories* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>10</sup>Steel, "In the Name of the Father," 67.

<sup>11</sup>Tran and Reid, *Viet Nam: Borderless Histories*, 222-223.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 223.

These efforts to gain influence on the larger scale within Vietnam would later prove to be a factor internationally.

About 40 years after Gia established the last Vietnamese Dynasty in the early 1800s, the French invaded. Overtly, France claimed the invasion was punitive, in retaliation for the ill treatment of the Nguyen Dynasty towards French Catholic missionaries. The leaders in Paris proclaimed to be specifically angered by the execution of the Catholic Bishop of Tonkin, a Spaniard named José Sanjurjo Diaz, and the Emperor's unwillingness to grant religious freedom to Christians.<sup>13</sup> The altruistic proclamations were cover for French commercial maneuvers, which lead to more control of the sea trade routes to China.<sup>14</sup> Although suffering failure initially in the North, the French moved south and were able to seize Saigon. As the French forces were seizing control of South Vietnam, the French Catholic missionaries were leading a rebellion in the North. The result was that the emperor had to make a decision of where to send his armies. Loathe engaging on two fronts, he chose to accept French demands in the South and sent his armies north to put down the rebellion.<sup>15</sup> The French saw no further national resistance and were able to establish a foothold in the country and although local bands conducting guerilla operations opposed them, it was never significant enough to push them out.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>James Haley, "1861 French Conquest of Saigon: Battle of the Ky Hoa Forts," History Net, <http://www.historynet.com/1861-french-conquest-of-saigon-battle-of-the-ky-hoa-forts.htm> (accessed November 23, 2012).

<sup>14</sup>FitzGerald, *Fire in the Lake*, 51.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

These successes set the stage for French rule of Vietnam. The Vietnamese fought thousands of battles, dozens of rulers came and went, and yet because none of the past rulers could gain and maintain a national sense of unity, the only thing they did for themselves was establish the conditions for another foreign occupation. Although the invasion was supposedly over the persecution of the missionaries, only one part of the peace treaty addressed them and it simply required “freedom of action” throughout the country.<sup>17</sup> This makes it clear the real intentions of the invasion were commercial in nature and given the disdain the Vietnamese had for foreign invaders, it also makes it clear the French were in for a difficult rule.

After a weak but successful invasion, the French strengthened their rule by consolidating power in the region leading to French Indochina being established. At the time, Indochina included of Annam, Tonkin and Cochinchina, the three regions of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.<sup>18</sup> Under French rule, the Confucian political and social structures began to collapse and the monarchy became a figurehead. By this time there were multiple reasons for France’s interest in strengthening rule in Vietnam versus simply maintaining a partnership with the country. Strategically, it was the first step toward India which had global ramifications.<sup>19</sup> Economically, Vietnam provided the raw materials to support French industrialism at home plus the British were actively

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<sup>17</sup>Ronald J. Cima, *Vietnam: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: Federal Research Division, 198).

<sup>18</sup>FitzGerald, *Fire in the Lake*, 52.

<sup>19</sup>Ellen J. Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1954), 3.

colonizing the region as well, so there was also a competitive element.<sup>20</sup> Over the course of the next decade, the French steered their efforts to make Vietnam an exclusive profit tool for Paris.<sup>21</sup>

As the French began expanding their commercial enterprises in the late 1800s the Japanese defeated the Russians in the Russo-Japanese War. This is significant because it rekindled the nationalist ideals of the Vietnamese people and fed the belief that an Asian power could defeat a Western power.<sup>22</sup> The “myth of white invincibility” was debunked and talk in the nationalist circles started focusing on modernizing to mount an offense against the French.<sup>23</sup> In the early 1900s this revolution was in its infancy, but still capable of episodic and violent uprisings, particularly in Annam and Tonkin and in fact, there was a credible attempt to poison the water at the French Garrison in Hanoi in 1908.<sup>24</sup>

These small victories offered encouragement for the Vietnamese to begin forming nationalist organizations. The groups wanted the French expelled, independence returned to Vietnam, and a democratic government in place. Some used terrorist activities to garner support and were dealt with harshly by the French when exposed.<sup>25</sup> The French were eventually able to stop the rebellion by requesting that the Chinese imprison those

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 57, 64.

<sup>21</sup>Donald Lancaster, *The Emancipation of French Indochina* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 59.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 73.

<sup>23</sup>Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina*, 59.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 60.

<sup>25</sup>Cima, *Vietnam: A Country Study*.

using Chinese territory as a sanctuary.<sup>26</sup> This small uprising, although largely defeated, was significant in the effort to gain independence because it was the product of the unification of multiple revolutionary organizations to steer their efforts toward the French. It also marked the first use of violent means to gain reforms from the French.<sup>27</sup>

Another significant global event that furthered the Vietnamese Nationalist movements was World War I. The investment in colonialism paid off for the French because during World War I, French Indochina provided over half of all the wartime loans to France and the second largest supply of raw materials.<sup>28</sup> Even though the country was greatly destabilized, Vietnam still provided about 50,000 troops and the same number of civilian workers to support the war. Heavy taxes were enacted, which did nothing to slow the revolutionary tide and in 1916, even the young Emperor Duy Tan participated in an uprising against the French that included Vietnamese soldiers as well. The uprisings were easily stopped and for his part, the Emperor was exiled, but the significance is the sheer scope of the displeasure of the French by the country's elite and its military.<sup>29</sup> The fervor to expel the foreign invaders was gaining momentum.

As time went on, the nationalist uprisings would become more and more prominent because the French applied more pressure.<sup>30</sup> To do this, they established a

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina*, 60.

<sup>29</sup>Cima, *Vietnam: A Country Study*.

<sup>30</sup>A. Cotterell Tupp, *French Indo-China* (London: Central Asian Society, 1906), 9-10.

French administrative structure focused on enforcing the tax codes. They also worked to control banking by establishing the bank of Indochina, heavily subsidized by a group of French banks and even referred to as “French Bank.”<sup>31</sup> The French worked hard to change Vietnamese culture as well. One key example was in land distribution.

Previously, the villages of Vietnam had a strong cooperative tradition where the poor were provided land to farm that gave them an opportunity to reestablish themselves within the society. However, the French came in and changed that by granting land to outsiders and commercial enterprises no doubt as a method to better control the outputs.<sup>32</sup>

Landownership became an important means by which the French would have power over the Vietnamese. By 1930, 80 percent of the rice land in the South would be controlled by 25 percent of the landowners and over 50 percent of the peasants were landless, working on large estates.<sup>33</sup> The new French system of land redistribution and control of the banking systems meant that a farmer who had a bad crop year could suffer unrecoverable losses leading to foreclosure and see his land resold at auction to a wealthy commercial landowner. Oftentimes the farmers’ land would be leased back to them with a debt of 40 percent of the crop yield, which then destroyed any hope of a farmer being independent.<sup>34</sup>

With the payoff so high for the peasant farmers working as sharecroppers, they were unable to update farming technology and were thus not competitive in the markets.

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<sup>31</sup>Lancaster, *The Emancipation of French Indochina*, 61.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 65.

These conditions led to the rise of people searching for work in the industries and the flood of potential workers gave rise to a brutal system of slave labor at worst, and indentured servitude at best. Some cotton mills were staffed with 75 percent women and children and miners were often as young as 10 years old.<sup>35</sup>

Hoping to alleviate some of the suffering and downward cultural spiral caused by this economic situation, Prince Buu Dao travelled to France to plead for policy relief and advocate for a more collaborative approach to governance in Vietnam. He failed in his efforts, but he left his son behind to be educated in France, who would eventually be enthroned as Emperor Bao Dai, and returned to Vietnam in 1932. Bao Dai again attempted to convince the French to loosen some restrictions but was frustrated every step of the way by French administrators. After the formation of the left wing French Popular Front Government in 1939, Bao Dai decided to travel to France and make the argument in Paris as his father did. Unfortunately for him, he achieved the same outcome as his father, and in fact, discovered that the National Archives did not even contain a copy of the Treaty signed by the emperor in 1884.<sup>36</sup>

After Bao Dai's failure, the French, whose business leaders claimed that the Vietnamese were not able to conduct affairs without them, shelved all attempts at reform within Vietnam.<sup>37</sup> Eventually the Communist Party became involved, led by Ho Chi Minh, a peasant scholar who left Vietnam at a young age as a kitchen hand on a French

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 66.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 75.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 76.



merchant ship and ended up in Paris studying Marxist-Leninism.<sup>38</sup> Ho Chi Minh began a sophisticated movement based outside of Vietnam to establish itself without fear of French reprisals. He started a training program for the communist revolutionaries to prepare them to go back to Vietnam and form communist cells throughout the country.<sup>39</sup>

To support the direct communist actions, Ho Chi Minh began prolific writing and became the central figure of the communist organizations operating in Indochina. In 1930, he gained enough power and support to unify the organizations as the Indochinese Communist Party.<sup>40</sup> There were frequent uprising from the communist exploitation of the peasants' discontent, and by the end of the year the French were using European troops and equipment to quell them. It is estimated that 10,000 civilians were casualties of the French and about the same number of participants were jailed, sent to penal settlements, or "special camps."<sup>41</sup> The Vietnamese communists persevered and in 1933 won a small but significant political victory, when two party members were elected to the Saigon Municipal Council. On the heels of this victory, communism began to spread under the guise of front organizations such as, the Indochinese Democratic Front espousing a message of anti-colonialism and pro-nationalism. The movement was further enabled by the French concession of freedom of speech and association within all French colonies,

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<sup>38</sup>Cima, *Vietnam: A Country Study*.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup>Lancaster, *The Emancipation of French Indochina*, 82, 83.

which meant that the Communist Party could operate overtly in Cochinchina the southern part of Vietnam.<sup>42</sup>

Being able to operate in the open allowed the Communist Party to solidify itself publicly in the South and continue operating clandestine networks in Annam and Tonkin. A setback came at the outbreak of World War II in Europe when the French legally dissolved the Communist Party of France and the French security services clamped down yet again in Vietnam. The Vietnamese communists were able to cobble together one last major uprising but it was brutally crushed by the French within two weeks. This established the internal stability and security in Vietnam until the Japanese occupation during World War II.<sup>43</sup>

One of Japan's ideological goals during World War II was to establish a Pan Asia, anti-Western conglomerate, to restore Asia to the Asians. The tool through which they were trying to accomplish this was establishing the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere, which would be an integrated and economically self-sufficient zone of Asian countries.<sup>44</sup> Their plan was to gain control over Indochina and then launch an attack on Singapore and the Dutch West Indies, as well as other minor European possessions. The Japanese knew that by accomplishing this, they would make moot any economic reprisals the U.S. could effect on them and it would assist Germany in further degrading the

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 84.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 85.

<sup>44</sup>Akira Iriye, *The Cold War in Asia: A Historical Introduction* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974), 59-60.

British Empire.<sup>45</sup> They used the distraction of the German attack on Russia to take the opportunity to invade Indochina as a first step to establishing control over Southeast Asia.<sup>46</sup>

The invasion came in June 1940 when the Japanese began by demanding from the French that they stop exports from Hiaphong to China. The French Governor General was unable to report and seek guidance or support from Paris because of the French government collapse and evacuation. Since there were not enough French forces in Indochina to prevent aggression from the Japanese, he capitulated and the terms were accepted. Allowing the French to save face, the Japanese accepted the French caveat that they would continue to administer Indochina and maintain sovereignty, but ultimately they were forced to accept Japan's "pre-eminent" position in Southeast Asia.<sup>47</sup>

This administrative requirement was disastrous for the French and resulted in them still being responsible for the pains of governance and management of Indochinese bureaucracies, but the Japanese were taking all of the economic benefits to support their war effort. The humiliation was acute and "obliterated the image of European colonial invincibility."<sup>48</sup> The response from the U.S. was predictable; they severed all economic ties with Japan, including the importation of oil. This was significant and had major

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 53-54.

<sup>46</sup>Iriye, *The Cold War in Asia*, 54.

<sup>47</sup>Lancaster, *The Emancipation of French Indochina*, 91-93.

<sup>48</sup>D. R. SarDesai, *Vietnam: The Struggle for National Identity* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), 53.

strategic consequences for Japan because at the time their Navy alone was using 400 tons of oil per day.<sup>49</sup>

Because of America's actions toward Japan, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and officially started World War II for the U.S. The next day, 8 December 1941, in Vietnam, the head of the Japanese Military mission sent demands to the French that they would not hinder any future Japanese military action, including attacks on Allied colonies and would continue to run the bureaucratic functions of Vietnam. Because of these demands to be complicit in the Axis war effort, and since the Japanese were taking all the economic benefits from their occupation of Vietnam, the French sovereignty was a facade.<sup>50</sup> Although an embarrassing turn of events for the French, to the Vietnamese, there was little change in life because the Japanese economic strategy was the same as before. Japan would provide capital and technology and Vietnam provided raw materials and industry, with the Japanese Yen becoming the favored currency.<sup>51</sup>

France's inability to counter anything the Japanese were doing led to French Indonesia being used by the Japanese as a base for troops prior to launching offensive operations. It was protected by fortifications through the Pacific Islands that provided a defense in depth and facilitated the massive logistical steps needed to effectively fight a war.<sup>52</sup> However, after the Allies retook the Philippine Islands, the Japanese worried they

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<sup>49</sup>Ian Buruma, *Inventing Japan, 1853-1964* (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 115.

<sup>50</sup>Lancaster, *The Emancipation of French Indochina*, 95-96.

<sup>51</sup>Iriye, *The Cold War in Asia*, 60.

<sup>52</sup>Hubertus J. van Mook, *The Stakes of Democracy in Southeast Asia* (New York: Norton, 1950), 133.

would retake Indochina and the French would assist them. To prevent this, the Japanese took over all the functions of the government and demanded the French be placed under Japanese command and assist in repulsing an Allied attack. The French attempted to mount an organized resistance, which collapsed within 24 hours, leaving Japan in complete control of the country.<sup>53</sup>

After establishing total control of Vietnam, the country fell further and further into chaos internally because the Japanese were not able to establish clear authority.<sup>54</sup> The Vietnamese resisted the Japanese, but their attempts at resistance were now moot, what was important for the future was that the total humiliation and subservience of the French by the Japanese provided the second example within a century of an Asian country dominating a Western power. When the Japanese withdrew, there became a leadership and governance vacuum within Vietnam, and since the Vietnamese were no longer impressed with the French, the conditions were set again for a Vietnamese nationalist struggle.<sup>55</sup>

As the war was raging, Ho Chi Minh, from his mountain sanctuary, was planning for post war Vietnam and establishing the Viet Minh, a communist nationalist independence organization. He began using the theme of independence to rally the people and during the war this message helped recruit and train an army of over 10,000 men. The Viet Minh wasted little effort countering the Japanese and in fact stayed in their

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<sup>53</sup>Lancaster, *The Emancipation of French Indochina*, 104-106.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>55</sup>SarDesai, *Vietnam: The Struggle for National Identity*, 53.

mountain base in Tonkin during the war, which allowed them to exploit the border with China if needed.<sup>56</sup>

In their sanctuary, the Viet Minh developed an aggressive post war plan and vision for the country. It was based on expelling the French, who they realized would attempt to reoccupy, and establishing a system of taxes based on “democratic principles.” Additionally, the Viet Minh wanted to build a national economy as a tool for unification, establish work place laws such as an eight hour workday, create unemployment benefits, establish a minimum wage, and provide government support for large families. Lastly, the Viet Minh wanted to greatly expand the educational and medical facilities within the country that had fallen into disrepair.<sup>57</sup> A key event for the Viet Minh came when the Japanese could not support the people of Tonkin during a famine, in which about 25 percent of the Tonkinese died. Seizing the opportunity, the Viet Minh provided humanitarian assistance that solidified a support base within the northern part of the country.<sup>58</sup>

Those humanitarian efforts assisted the Viet Minh in laying the groundwork for popular support when the Japanese surrendered to the Allies. When the Japanese surrendered, they essentially quit caring about Vietnam and this inaction allowed the Viet Minh to fill the vacuum and operate within the governmental structure. This afforded the Viet Minh some political legitimacy and led to the election of a provincial government with Ho Chi Minh as the head. The government was popular and approved a 10 point

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<sup>56</sup>Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina*, 95, 97.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>58</sup>SarDesai, *Vietnam: The Struggle for National Identity*, 56.

plan to formally establish the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). Although 10 of the 15 members of Ho Chi Minh's cabinet were communists, the DRV Declaration of Independence contained numerous exact phrases from the U.S. Declaration of Independence. Ho Chi Minh also attempted to recruit members of the non-communist nationalist parties into his cabinet with hopes of consolidating the nationalist effort.<sup>59</sup>

Regardless of the seemingly democratic actions of the Viet Minh, no country recognized the DRV and it suffered a major setback when the Potsdam Agreement was implemented. In the agreement, the Chinese took control of the country from the 16th Parallel North and the British took control to the South until the French could recolonize.<sup>60</sup> Plus, although the Viet Minh had made major gains in consolidating power to attempt to expel another occupier, the fact remained that they were only one of six nationalist groups who were recognized as political parties.<sup>61</sup> This led to a brutal time in Vietnamese history because the Japanese allowed the various nationalist parties to duke it out for political control and the Viet Minh with its 10,000 man army was ferocious. Since the French did not have the combat power to provide security, this further eroded confidence in the French and lent support to the Viet Minh propaganda efforts.<sup>62</sup>

The French began reoccupation in Cochinchina because the British, also being a colonial power, were sympathetic to their cause and assisted them. The fight to take

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<sup>59</sup>SarDesai, *Vietnam: The Struggle for National Identity*, 57.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 58.

<sup>62</sup>Charles W. Koburger, *Naval Expeditions: The French Return to Indochina, 1945-1946* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), 33, 34, 37.

Saigon back was especially difficult and brutal because the Viet Minh used torture, murder and rape against the French civilians and it was not until early 1946 that the French could say they controlled Vietnam south of the 16th Parallel.<sup>63</sup> Ho Chi Minh understood that the French were going to re-occupy the north and set out to negotiate favorable terms. In return for accepting a small contingent of French forces in the north, the French agreed to recognize the DRV and grant it an army, a governing body, and some financial gains.<sup>64</sup> The opponents of Ho Chi Minh widely criticized the agreement with the French to which he responded to a confidant, “It is better to sniff French dung for a while than to eat China’s all our lives.” Ho Chi Minh knew there would be a war fought and preferred to pick a fight with an occupying western country thousands of miles from home, than with a neighbor.<sup>65</sup>

Almost immediately after the agreement with France was signed it was in dispute and the tensions mounted over the details. Ho Chi Minh wanted the three regions unified under Hanoi and a five year plan for the withdrawal of French forces.<sup>66</sup> The French however had no intention of allowing anything beyond the March Accords.<sup>67</sup> Again, this set the stage for armed conflict, and the catalyst for the conflict came in the northern city of Haiphong.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 47, 66.

<sup>64</sup>Cima, *Vietnam: A Country Study*.

<sup>65</sup>SarDesai, *Vietnam: The Struggle for National Identity*, 58.

<sup>66</sup>Koburger, *Naval Expeditions*, 107.

<sup>67</sup>Irving, *The First Indochina War*, 27.

<sup>68</sup>Koburger, *Naval Expeditions*, 108.



In Hiaphong, a running dispute within the negotiations was the administration of customs in Hiaphong Harbor. The Viet Minh insisted on controlling it because it was seen as a symbol of independence and was a source of revenue and clandestine weapons through smuggling. In October 1946, the French took control of the customs, which immediately escalated the tensions and Ho Chi Minh and his military commander Vo Nguyen Giap, decided that for propaganda reasons, they would cause an incident that would paint the Viet Minh struggle in a sympathetic light. The result was days of terrible street fighting but the heavy bombing and ground fighting served the Viet Minh purpose and gave them a propaganda victory.<sup>69</sup> The numbers were significant, by French accounts approximately 6,000 Vietnamese were killed in the action.<sup>70</sup> Multiple sources have marked the action in Haiphong as the official start of the First Indochina War.

With the war started, the DRV leaders returned to the hills with their army of now about 40,000 men to manage the coming insurgency campaign.<sup>71</sup> The army of the DRV was fighting for the unity of the nation and viewed the French as simply another occupier that they would fight to the end to expel. The French on the other hand were fighting halfway across the globe, with little popular support, after a series of demoralizing

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<sup>69</sup>United States, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the First Indochina War, 1947-1954* (Washington, DC: Office of Joint History, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2004), 108, 109.

<sup>70</sup>Irving, *The First Indochina War*, 27.

<sup>71</sup>SarDesai, *Vietnam: The Struggle for National Identity*, 59.

defeats in World War II. In essence, the war they were fighting was a last attempt by the French to prove they were still a great global power.<sup>72</sup>

The tactics of the DRV Army were effective and by 1947, the French had achieved no decisive victories; the war seemed like a military and political stalemate causing France to look for assistance from the international community. The U.S. seemed the most logical choice since they wanted to see a strong NATO force in Europe and France was a key component for that.<sup>73</sup> The problem was that President Roosevelt was staunchly anti-colonialism and believed that pre-World War II colonies should be placed under United Nations control.<sup>74</sup> On the other hand, the U.S. was beginning to become concerned with the spread of communism so they would not support complete independence for Vietnam as long as the left dominated the opposition groups.<sup>75</sup>

In light of the U.S. positions, two significant events happened during 1949 that affected the Vietnamese fight to defeat the French occupiers. The first was the “Bao Dai” Solution, where the former Emperor Bao Dai would return to Vietnam as the head of state. The compromise was intended to provide some independence for the Vietnamese; however the French did not release any real control of the country, so it was merely a pro

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<sup>72</sup>United States, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the First Indochina War, 1947-1954*, 20.

<sup>73</sup>Joyce Kolko and Gabriel Kolko, *The Limits of Power: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1954* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 684.

<sup>74</sup>Archimedes L. A. Patti, *Why Viet Nam?: Prelude to America's Albatross* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 17.

<sup>75</sup>Kolko and Kolko, *The Limits of Power*, 685.

forma agreement.<sup>76</sup> The second event was the victory of the Chinese communist revolution that, ironically, Ho Chi Minh was reluctant to openly embrace until the Chinese moved forces within striking distance of Hanoi.<sup>77</sup> It was significant to the French and Viet Minh because it facilitated resupply to the Viet Minh forces with weapons and equipment.<sup>78</sup>

Although very weak in terms of granting real independence to the Vietnamese, the establishment of the State of Vietnam, as a result of the Bao Dia Solution, removed any moral objections the U.S. policy makers had regarding the French involvement in Vietnam. As the Cold War began to heat up with the Chinese Maoist revolution, the U.S. expanded its support to the French and began to focus efforts on stopping communist expansion in the region over granting independence to the Vietnamese.<sup>79</sup> Although the U.S. was not entirely pleased with the French actions in Vietnam, they went along in order to garner support for strategic initiatives in Europe. Additionally, U.S. policy makers at the time viewed communism in a monolithic light, in that there was no difference between a Russian communist and a Vietnamese communist, for example.<sup>80</sup> This view of communism was seemingly validated for the U.S. when in January 1950,

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<sup>76</sup>Mike Gravel and Noam Chomsky, *The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of the United States Decision Making on Vietnam*, The Senator Mike Gravel Edition (Beacon Press, 1971), 53.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 51.

<sup>78</sup>William S. Turley, *The Second Indochina War* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), 4.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

<sup>80</sup>Gravel and Chomsky, *The Pentagon Papers*, 54.

the Soviets and China formally recognized the DRV which made Vietnam the southern front of the Cold War.<sup>81</sup>

By 1954 the war had taken a brutal toll on the French but they refused direct U.S. intervention because they wanted to ensure they could control the post war fate of the country.<sup>82</sup> As a result, by late 1953, French defeat was imminent; Vietnam was well on its way to maintaining their history of defeating foreign occupiers.<sup>83</sup> In early 1954, the French were on the ropes. The troops were thoroughly demoralized, French public opinion of the effort was unsupportive and there was incredible internal turmoil in France because they were on their 20th government since the end of World War II. Their last hope was through the fifth commander of the effort against the Viet Minh in five years, General Henri Navarre. Navarre and his Navarre Plan intended to “break up and destroy regular enemy forces of Indochina” by forcing the Viet Minh to fight in conventional engagements and toward that end, he chose Dien Bien Phu as the battlefield. Dien Bien Phu was a strategically significant valley on the Laotian boarder through which the Viet Minh would pass to attack.<sup>84</sup> The result was a disaster. The Viet Minh surrounded the garrison, bombed it with artillery, prevented resupply, and through the course of about six weeks killed approximately 1,500 French. On May 7, 1954, the French surrendered the

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<sup>81</sup>SarDesai, *Vietnam: The Struggle for National Identity*, 61.

<sup>82</sup>Kolko and Kolko, *The Limits of Power*, 684.

<sup>83</sup>Gravel and Chomsky, *The Pentagon Papers*, 55, 56.

<sup>84</sup>SarDesai, *Vietnam: The Struggle for National Identity*, 61, 62.

garrison one day before scheduled peace negotiations were to begin in Geneva Switzerland.<sup>85</sup>

With the fall of the Dien Bien Phu garrison, the Vietnamese had done it again; they had beaten a seemingly unbeatable foreign occupier who thought they could conquer them. One official, speaking of the folly of France's effort, was quoted as saying about Vietnam, that "one could obliterate it, but never reconquer it."<sup>86</sup> The questions to be resolved for the Vietnamese, however, were who would be the next world power to make the attempt, what would be their motivations and what sacrifices would the Vietnamese have to make to stop them.

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<sup>85</sup>Cima, *Vietnam: A Country Study*.

<sup>86</sup>Kolko and Kolko, *The Limits of Power*, 687.

CHAPTER 3  
UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY  
REGARDING CONTAINMENT  
1946 to 1955

The final assault on the garrison of Dien Bien Phu in March 1954 was timed to coincide with the previously scheduled Geneva Convention of 1954. During the siege, the French Armed Forces Chief of Staff, General Paul Ely, in a meeting with the U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Arthur Radford, alluded that because of the situation at Dien Bien Phu, France would likely not be able to demand acceptable terms from the Viet Minh at the Geneva Convention. Additionally, he underscored the dire nature of the fight for the garrison and requested for the first time, direct support from the U.S. This is significant because it is the first time that, in a direct manner, a realistic scenario developed where the U.S. might enter the fray. For his part, Radford did not dismiss the notion; however he laid out nearly unattainable requirements for the French to meet. The U.S. wanted a formal request for assistance from the French, the involvement to have the support of the United Nations, they wanted the involvement to be as a component of a coalition, and finally, internally, the U.S. Congress would have to approve the intervention.<sup>87</sup>

These conditions were impossible to meet prior to the fall of Dien Bien Phu and prior to the opening of the Geneva Conference. As a result, the U.S and France were in very weak negotiating positions. As such, the U.S. was reluctant to attend the conference,

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<sup>87</sup>United States, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the First Indochina War*, 153, 157.

knowing that little good would come from it and likely would not have attended had the unification of Korea not been on the agenda.<sup>88</sup> However, in a display of unity with France, the U.S. attended with their list of objectives. They wanted three things: the elimination of the Viet Minh which had been tainted by their association with communist China, retention of the Tonkin Delta and the economic capability it provided, and more nebulous but most important was to disrupt the spread of communist political and military influence throughout the globe.<sup>89</sup>

The two major communist countries involved in the talks were China and the USSR. The USSR specifically wanted to avert a larger expanded war in the region and especially anything that would be in direct conflict with the U.S. Other hopes were to reduce the prospects of the European Defense Community and to increase the international prestige of China, their new ally. Similarly, China wanted to be considered a major Asian power and took the opportunity to play a role at the Geneva talks to project a commitment to global peace. The Chinese likely wanted to maintain a communist government as a buffer to their borders.<sup>90</sup>

The French essentially wanted an immediate ceasefire and a negotiated settlement that would allow them to exit with some dignity and preserve a modicum of influence in

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<sup>88</sup>Victor Bator, *Vietnam, a Diplomatic Tragedy: The Origins of the United States Involvement* (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Oceana Publications, 1965), 16.

<sup>89</sup>Melvin Gurtov, *Negotiations and Vietnam: A Case Study of the 1954 Geneva Conference* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp, 1968), 70.

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, 53, 54.

the region.<sup>91</sup> Specifically though, they wanted Viet Minh forces in Cambodia and Laos to withdraw, regular units in Vietnam to move into predetermined zones, irregulars disarmed, and the release of prisoners of war and interned civilians.<sup>92</sup> Privately, however, the French were willing to give up more because of the negative opinion of the war at home. In addition to the low public opinion in France, the French Government was still in disarray and it fell again on 12 June. This led to Pierre Mendes-France becoming the President of the Council and Minister of Foreign Affairs, which was equivalent of the Prime Minister. Mendes-France, in response to popular pressure regarding the war, was greatly involved in the negotiating and agreed to resign if he could not reach an armistice in 30 days.<sup>93</sup>

Mendes-France's promise to resign caused a sense of urgency to the negotiations and they began to focus on a settlement that would split the country. Splitting the country was however, unacceptable to the U.S. who withdrew its delegation as a result of the path the negotiations were taking. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles eventually sent retired Army General Bedell Smith, who was serving as Dulles's Under Secretary of State back for the negotiations. Smith continued to monitor the proceedings as an observer and frequently provided guidance and advice to Vietnamese Emperor Bao Dai, however his

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<sup>91</sup>Douglas Pike, *History of Vietnamese Communism, 1925-1976* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1978), 88.

<sup>92</sup>Lancaster, *The Emancipation of French Indochina*, 318.

<sup>93</sup>Chester L. Cooper, *The Lost Crusade: America in Vietnam* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1970), 90.



efforts were deemed largely fruitless as the looming deadline set by Mendes-France came closer.<sup>94</sup>

The final week of the conference saw a flurry of action, where the end result was more in line with the conference attendees from the most powerful countries, than Vietnam.<sup>95</sup> Vietnam was split into two at the 17th Parallel and the final declaration had the fatal flaw of stipulating that these two countries would have separate civil administrations until national elections, in two years. The countries had bipolar political philosophies, foreign policies, and diametric socioeconomic systems, which meant that the agreement was little more than a temporary ceasefire instead of a peace treaty of armistice. Future elections aside, these two countries would never unify without further military action because of their vast differences. And since military action is exactly what the Viet Minh used to gain political recognition for the DRV to begin with, it was clear that the Accords were a victory for Ho Chi Minh who called them “a temporary action.”<sup>96</sup>

The U.S. was also unhappy with the Accords and wasted no time expressing displeasure with the 11th hour agreement, which President Eisenhower saw as a communist victory.<sup>97</sup> Shortly after the closing ceremonies he confirmed this by announcing the U.S.’s desire to establish a collective defense organization for South East Asia, to prevent either direct or indirect aggression from the communists. Towards that

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<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 82.

<sup>95</sup>Gurtov, *Negotiations and Vietnam*, 50.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 46, 60.

<sup>97</sup>Sherman Adams, *Firsthand Report: The Story of the Eisenhower Administration* (New York: Harper, 1961), 125.

end, Secretary of State Dulles attended the Manila Conference in September 1954, which produced the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). Since Eisenhower refused to participate in unilateral action in Vietnam, this provided a coalition with which to use as a tool against China, the U.S.'s main threat in the region.<sup>98</sup>

SEATO's intent was to "hold the Cold War Frontier."<sup>99</sup> Its main objective however, was to "to prevent and counter subversive activities directed from without the Parties' territorial integrity and political stability."<sup>100</sup> It was a nebulous document, but served a purpose in that it allowed for political acceptance of a construct with which communism in the region could be countered.<sup>101</sup> The signatories were the U.S., Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, Pakistan and the Philippines. Like the Geneva Agreement, SEATO was seen as serving those larger foreign powers, when they were not directly threatened.<sup>102</sup>

In a practical manner, SEATO served almost no purpose for anyone. It required the signatory countries to maintain and develop some capacities to counter aggression and subversion, but emphasized that any action must be preceded by a request for

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<sup>98</sup>Cooper, *The Lost Crusade*, 102, 105.

<sup>99</sup>Ronald C. Nairn, "SEATO: A Critique," *Pacific Affairs* 41, no. 1 (1968): 17.

<sup>100</sup>W. Macmahon Ball, "A Political Re-Examination of SEATO," *International Organization* 12, no. 1 (Winter 1958): 23.

<sup>101</sup>David McKnight, "Western Intelligence and SEATO's War on Subversion, 1956-63," *Intelligence & National Security* 20, no. 2 (2005): 290-291.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*, 288.

assistance from that particular country.<sup>103</sup> A few key provisions provide some focus for the agreement and highlight its flaws. First, the Australians, in an effort to steer clear of the Kashmir dispute, added a provision to ensure no parts of the agreement pertained to conflict between two Asian countries.<sup>104</sup> Additionally, the U.S. made stipulations that only communist aggression threatened peace and that Cambodia, Laos, and South Vietnam, although not even signatories, were the only countries listed specifically as countries that an attack of, endangered the peace and safety of all countries.<sup>105</sup> Lastly, the agreement did not obligate a response and left the decision of what constituted aggression up to the signatories. Clearly, this was to be an instrument that the U.S. could leverage to ensure that U.S. foreign policy regarding Southeast Asia could be defended militarily. The strength of the agreement relied almost completely on U.S. action, which if needed, would be conducted regardless.<sup>106</sup> Despite the lack of practical functions of the agreement, it served two philosophical purposes for the U.S. First, it provided a future legal instrument for the Eisenhower Administration to use in expanding U.S. intervention in Vietnam. Second and more importantly, it demonstrated the key tenants of the Eisenhower foreign policy regarding the spread of global communism.

The development of the Eisenhower foreign policy began in July 1947 when George Kennan, an American Diplomat serving at the National War College wrote the

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<sup>103</sup>M. L. Thomas, "A Critical Appraisal of Seato," *Political Research Quarterly*, 10, no. 4 (1957): 928-929.

<sup>104</sup>Ball, "A Political Re-Examination of SEATO," 17.

<sup>105</sup>Thomas, "A Critical Appraisal of Seato," 929.

<sup>106</sup>Ball, "A Political Re-Examination of SEATO," 19-20.

article titled “The Sources of Soviet Conduct.” Originally published in *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, the article was written under the pseudonym “X” because at the time, it was not official policy. It did two important things that would be foundational for the evolution of U.S. foreign policy: (1) gave a description of the Soviet view of capitalism and (2) it laid out the philosophical foundations for what would become U.S. policy towards communism.<sup>107</sup> The article was an expansion of Kennan’s views of Soviet communism that he provided to the U.S. State Department through a telegram colloquially called, “The Long Telegram” in February 1946.<sup>108</sup> The Long Telegram was Kennan’s response, when stationed in Moscow, to questions arising in Washington about a speech given by Stalin regarding the anticipated conflict with capitalist powers.<sup>109</sup>

In the telegram Kennan articulated his belief that the Soviets viewed capitalism as inherently bad for the world and it would eventually destroy societies, because it prevents a country from being in control of their own economy. This was a fundamental conflict with capitalism so therefore there could never be any collaborative aims between a communist power and a capitalist power. As such, Kennan believed that small gestures at diplomacy must be regarded as tactical maneuvering to support the decline of capitalism.<sup>110</sup> In essence, he felt that everything the Soviets did was to advance their

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<sup>107</sup>X (George Kennan), “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” *Foreign Affairs* (July 1947): 858, 862.

<sup>108</sup>Telegram, George Kennan to the George Marshall (“The Long Telegram”), February 22, 1946 (Harry S. Truman Administrative Files, Elsie Papers), 2.

<sup>109</sup>Efstathios T. Fakiolas, “Kennan's Long Telegram and NSC-68: A Comparative Theoretical Analysis,” *East European Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (1997): 415.

<sup>110</sup>“The Long Telegram,” 858, 859.

relative strength globally. Kennan also described a notion of the “infallibility of the Kremlin,” where the leadership is always right and for that reason, the system requires ironclad discipline to operate.<sup>111</sup>

The article goes on to describe communism in ideological terms, which allows the Soviets to take a long view regarding increasing global power. Even though the system is rigid on the surface, there was an understanding of local political realities by the Soviets, so there was flexibility to respond to geopolitical changes. The Soviets might move quickly in one region of the world in order to simply gain access and then over time, would fully convert that country to a uniform mindset.<sup>112</sup> This is significant to the U.S. problem in Vietnam because, although Ho Chi Minh was a proclaimed communist, he was not as rigid as the Soviets wished, considering that a lot of the content of the DRV founding documents were copied from the U.S. Declaration of Independence. Ho Chi Minh did not fully support communism until communist China moved forces within striking distance of Hanoi in 1949.<sup>113</sup> In practical terms, this move was significant because of Ho Chi Minh’s change to a more overt support of communism, he provided himself an ally to assist in resupply to the Viet Minh forces with weapons and equipment.<sup>114</sup>

To support his beliefs in communist expansion, Kennan predicted the Soviets would increase their military industrialization, which would in turn increase the military

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<sup>111</sup>X, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” 859.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., 860-861.

<sup>113</sup>Gravel and Chomsky, *The Pentagon Papers*, 51.

<sup>114</sup>Turley, *The Second Indochina War*, 4.

capabilities and potential. This creates the practical tie between Vietnam and communist expansion because this military and industrial growth would allow the Soviets to exploit colonial areas by providing a military deterrent or motivation for a former Western power colony to fall under the communist umbrella. The Long Telegram also articulates a philosophical linkage that ties all communist political parties to the Communist International, which was controlled by the Soviets, there by creating a communist conspiracy.<sup>115</sup> This became a concern for the U.S. in Indonesia, where the fear was that the communists would take over and interfere with East-West communications leaving Australia vulnerable, and in Vietnam, where the fear was that the communists would interfere with the post World War II reconstruction of Japan, by controlling the raw materials markets.<sup>116</sup>

Kennan made the recommendation that because of this expansionist view, “This would itself warrant the U.S. entering with reasonable confidence upon a policy of firm containment, designed to confront the Russians with unalterable counterforce at every point where they show signs of encroaching upon the interest of a peaceful and stable world.”<sup>117</sup> Thus was written the beginnings of what would provide a focus for U.S. foreign policy and eventually be molded into the Eisenhower foreign policy applied to Vietnam. Containment was born out of an attempt to clean up the mess of the U.S.’s World War II “Faustian bargain” with the Soviets in the effort to defeat Nazi Germany.

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<sup>115</sup>“The Long Telegram,” 6-8.

<sup>116</sup>Wilson D. Miscamble, *George F. Kennan and the Making of American Foreign Policy, 1947-1950* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 274-275.

<sup>117</sup>X, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” 867.

At its heart was the need to prevent the Soviets from using the post war global chaos to reshape the international order.<sup>118</sup>

There has been much debate because many thought the idea of containment specifically meant matching military power but Kennan actually saw it differently. He viewed the containment effort as a holistic approach using all the instruments of U.S. power that could be introduced. These governmental entities would coordinate their efforts to win sympathies in countries under communist pressure, leading to a loss of Soviet influence. Since the philosophy of communism requires staunch discipline, he predicted the leadership in Moscow would not tolerate the ideological diversity regarding capitalism and that containment would be reflective of U.S. values.<sup>119</sup> This was likely because the State Department felt that French colonial policies in Indochina fed the communist narrative and facilitated their expansion.<sup>120</sup>

Since he knew that the U.S. could not defeat communism alone, and he believed that no political movement could subject itself to long-term frustration without changing, the intent was to introduce regional economic diversity to increase the strain on the Soviets, to steer them toward moderation in their views.<sup>121</sup> Because of this, Kennan believed that a key to successful containment would be to tie all of Southeast Asia

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<sup>118</sup>John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4.

<sup>119</sup>Richard A. Melanson and David Allan Mayers, *Reevaluating Eisenhower: American Foreign Policy in the 1950s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 33-34.

<sup>120</sup>*Ibid.*, 275-276.

<sup>121</sup>X, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," 868.

together as a regional block against communism.<sup>122</sup> After almost seven years, that is exactly what John Foster Dulles was able to do by crafting SEATO. Unfortunately for Kennan, his ambiguity in writing the article and the Long Telegram in regards to using the military manifested itself with the very militaristic crafting of National Security Council (NSC) Memo-68.

The development of NSC-68 started after World War II when President Truman made large cuts to military spending under the assumption that U.S. economic and remaining military power would provide a deterrent to any Soviet global efforts to expand the communist umbrella. However, as time passed, the Soviets were able to increase their military capacity and the resultant commitments to containment by the U.S. government began to strain the military.<sup>123</sup> Kennan saw the role of containment as an indirect lever focusing on economics and all other instruments of national power.<sup>124</sup> That is not to say that he did not understand the incredible power of the U.S. military, and in particular, the nuclear arsenal. Among his advice to policy makers was to present the U.S. as, “too strong to be beaten, and too determined to be frightened.” Kennan helped shape the policy with the understanding that the strength of the military provides the credibility

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<sup>122</sup>Miscamble, *George F. Kennan and the Making of American Foreign Policy*, 273.

<sup>123</sup>Christopher A. Preble, *The Uses of Threat Assessment in Historical Perspective Perception, Misperception, and Political Will* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Project on National Security, Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, 2006), 2.

<sup>124</sup>Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 91.



with which all other efforts can be facilitated, but it should be a fixed element that can be provided when vital interests are threatened.<sup>125</sup>

NSC-68 was a Top Secret report to the National Security Council on U.S. objectives and programs for national security. It was issued in April 1950 and was written by a small ad hoc group of State and Defense officials under the leadership of Paul Nitze, who had replaced Kennan as the Director of Policy Planning at the State Department. The purpose of the document was to “systemize containment” which meant, to understand what means could be used to make it work within the U.S. governmental construct.<sup>126</sup>

It was believed that the Soviet Union would reach nuclear parity with the U.S. in 1954.<sup>127</sup> As such, a conventional arms race began to develop. Officials at the time finally came to the realization that the U.S. would simply not be able to afford a military that inflexibly addressed every threat of the spread of communism. The argument then became economic and the notion that if the U.S. actually “increased” military spending, the budget would increase as a second order effect of larger productive capacity resultant from the increased spending. This philosophy advanced by Leon Keyserling was a prime justification for the increased defense spending required to implement NSC-68.<sup>128</sup> The surprise of the Korean War certainly did not hurt in convincing Truman to approve

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<sup>125</sup>Robert J. Teague, “Containment: Relevant or Relic?” (Master’s Thesis, US Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2011), 60.

<sup>126</sup>Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 90.

<sup>127</sup>Fakiolas, “Kennan’s Long Telegram and NSC-68: A Comparative Theoretical Analysis,” 424.

<sup>128</sup>John Lewis Gaddis, “Was the Truman Doctrine a Real Turning Point?” *Foreign Affairs* 52, no. 2 (1974): 395-396.

NSC-68, with support from the U.S. Congress, and national security requirements became the driver for fiscal policy.<sup>129</sup>

The key difference between NSC-68 and the previous Truman Doctrine that encompassed the Kennan view, is that NSC-68 elevated peripheral interests under the notion that due to the fragile balance of power and potential for future communist victories, loss of any ground (be it physical or diplomatic) to the communists would present an unacceptable loss of U.S. global credibility. The fundamental shift was that before NSC-68, Kennan focused his containment ideas on the communist intentions and how to prevent them from coming to fruition. Nitze's containment focused on actual communist capabilities and how to counter them.<sup>130</sup> As such, the containment policy under Nitze became an arms race, where the U.S. was prepared to conduct man-to-man defense globally, with a requirement to be ready in 1954 when the Soviet nuclear capability negated the U.S. advantage. The economic engine of this race was irrelevant because of the Keynesian argument to, "expand the pie, not argue over how to divide it."<sup>131</sup>

Another major difference was that the Kennan view saw containment as a temporary policy, wherein the economic growth of non-communist societies, along the edges of the Soviet Union, would require the Russians to moderate their tone globally and open the door for real negotiations. The Kennan view provided a distinction between international communism as a political construct and pure communist imperialism. The

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<sup>129</sup>Preble, *The Uses of Threat Assessment in Historical Perspective*, 4-5.

<sup>130</sup>Melanson and Mayers, *Reevaluating Eisenhower*, 36.

<sup>131</sup>Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 93-94, 97.

latter was the real threat that could be influenced through long-term peaceful diplomacy. It was not a policy of “universalism” where the U.S. ascribes to a monolithic and ultimately fiscally unsustainable security policy that applied in every corner of the globe.<sup>132</sup>

Disregarding Kennan’s opinion of universalism and in addition to laying out the mechanics of the containment strategy, NSC-68 was also a strongly worded piece of rhetoric. The document served as an apoplectic sales pitch to the people through Congress in the era of McCarthyism. However, even though the crafters used hyperbole in framing the problem, there was an underlying belief in the analysis that the communists were driven by a, “totalitarianism ideology that compelled unlimited expansion and absolute control” which was in direct conflict with the U.S. notion of power guided by moral purpose. The reality became that because of this competitive nature, the only policy available was containment and the only way to do it was spelled out in NSC-68.<sup>133</sup>

One key component to NSC-68 is that it advanced the discussion of the philosophy of containment by providing an official government definition. The document defined containment policy as the effort, “by all means short of war” to: (1) block further Soviet expansion, (2) expose Soviet “falsities,” (3) force a Soviet reaction to degrading global influence and (4) foster the seeds of Soviet destruction. For context, NSC-68 saw all communist aggression as tied to a military action.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup>Gaddis, “Was the Truman Doctrine a Real Turning Point?” 398-399.

<sup>133</sup>Melanson and Mayers, *Reevaluating Eisenhower*, 39-40.

<sup>134</sup>Gaddis, “Was the Truman Doctrine a Real Turning Point?” 98-99.

The final validation for NSC-68, as U.S. policy, came on the last day of Truman's time in office when he signed NSC-141. NSC-141 was instituted as a reassessment of the Soviet threat and concluded that all of the assumptions of Soviet aggression spelled out in NSC-68 were valid. It emphasized that in light of this, any decreases in military spending would be both imprudent strategically and unnecessary domestically. It reinforced the idea that governmental budget constraints be subordinate to global national security, in regards to communist expansion.<sup>135</sup> This was the philosophical foundation of a foreign policy that Eisenhower would inherit and ultimately have to mold to fit his views of containment and the practical challenges he would face domestically regarding the national budget.

Eisenhower took office January 20, 1953, with the promise of bringing the Korean War to a quick end and avoiding similar situations in the future.<sup>136</sup> He selected John Foster Dulles as his Secretary of State, with whom for two years; he had been engaging in long discussions about the future foreign policy.<sup>137</sup> Philosophically both men agreed with the strategy of containment, with Dulles going farther and advocating for a "roll back" policy.<sup>138</sup> The future came to show that Eisenhower's choice was likely a calculated decision, to support what would be the cornerstone of his version of the containment theory, but that aside, when Dulles was selected, he was always very candid

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<sup>135</sup>Preble, *The Uses of Threat Assessment in Historical Perspective*, 5-6.

<sup>136</sup>Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Pentomic Era: The US Army between Korea and Vietnam* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1986), 11.

<sup>137</sup>Adams, *Firsthand Report*, 45.

<sup>138</sup>Teague, "Containment: Relevant or Relic," 67.

about his moralist views of foreign policy and it informed his position toward the spread of communism.<sup>139</sup> As would be expressed by Sherman Adams, Eisenhower's Chief of Staff, years later, "I think that the hard and uncompromising line that the U.S. government took toward Soviet Russia and Red China between 1953 and the early months of 1959, was more a Dulles line than an Eisenhower one."<sup>140</sup>

Although Eisenhower agreed philosophically with the ends as written in NSC-68 and NSC-141, he was staunchly against the means. He immediately set out to revamp the policy by tying domestic and foreign affairs together. Eisenhower believed in a view closer to Kennan's, where there was a moral obligation of the U.S. to employ all instruments of power to contain communism, and the military was simply another tool in the chest. Holistically, Eisenhower was adamant that these instruments must be tied to the domestic policy to be sustainable over the long-term.<sup>141</sup> As such, he sought to balance military spending with the capacity of the domestic economy.<sup>142</sup>

Eisenhower was unhappy with Truman's application of the containment philosophy because he thought the increased deficit from military spending would lead to isolationism at home. This would develop into a security paranoid garrison state where personal liberties were steadily whittled away.<sup>143</sup> In a speech he said, "Our system must remain solvent, as we attempt a solution of this great problem of security. Else we have

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<sup>139</sup>Merlo J. Pusey, *Eisenhower, the President* (New York: Macmillan, 1956), 129.

<sup>140</sup>Adams, *Firsthand Report*, 87.

<sup>141</sup>Melanson and Mayers, *Reevaluating Eisenhower*, 41-43.

<sup>142</sup>Preble, *The Uses of Threat Assessment in Historical Perspective*, 6.

<sup>143</sup>Melanson and Mayers, *Reevaluating Eisenhower*, 48-49.

lost the battle from within that we are trying to win from without.” He explained national power comprehensively by saying, “Spiritual force, multiplied by economic force, multiplied by military force is roughly equal to security.”<sup>144</sup> So toward the end of striking an internal balance of power between military and economic might, he instituted Project Solarium in order to provide the administration with a policy that would later be called the New Look.

Project Solarium consisted of three “task forces” of seven participants each directed to reshape U.S. foreign policy.<sup>145</sup> The central theme was to regain the initiative globally, versus the previous NSC-68 and NSC-141 policy of responding to Soviet actions; Eisenhower wanted to lower the cost while doing so.<sup>146</sup> The task forces were to develop three courses of action to use for the development of policy. George Kennan led Group A, although he had been a long time and frustrated Truman Administration advisor on the containment policy. Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Goodpaster was the leader of Group B. Goodpaster was Eisenhower’s Defense Liaison and the Army’s leading expert on the role of nuclear weapons in war. Colonel Robert Bowie, who had served in the Army legal division and went on to various State Department and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) positions, led Group C.<sup>147</sup>

Project Solarium was started in part because Eisenhower was profoundly disturbed by the increase in defense spending after World War II. He viewed it as a threat

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<sup>144</sup>Preble, *The Uses of Threat Assessment in Historical Perspective*, 6-7.

<sup>145</sup>Teague, “Containment: Relevant or Relic,” 68-69.

<sup>146</sup>Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 146.

<sup>147</sup>Teague, “Containment: Relevant or Relic,” 69.

to the foundation of America, in that confronting communism in the manner called for in NCS-68 would require greater bureaucratic controls (specifically in the form of taxes) which would impede freedom. He felt that these increased long-term demands would demoralize the citizenry and Eisenhower believed that, a “sound dollar lies at the very basis of a sound capability for defense.”<sup>148</sup>

After about a month of work, the groups presented their courses of action to Eisenhower, who essentially directed an amalgamation of all of them into a “unified policy.”<sup>149</sup> The resultant conclusions were:

1. The Soviet threat was long term and not imminent, that it would marginalize with proper actions from the U.S.
2. Conventional troops mattered, but not as much as nuclear weapons.
3. Both conventional and nuclear would still be needed to counter balance the Soviets and government would have to find the right balance between contentment and alarm.
4. Contain the Soviets. Do not try to roll them back.
5. Establish deterrent capacity and resolve.<sup>150</sup>

These findings were approved by Eisenhower and the National Security Council in October 1953, and published in the Top Secret NSC 162/2 titled “Basic National Security Policy.” This was a watershed moment for the Eisenhower Administration because it returned the balance of security and economy by relying on the (then) overwhelming power of the U.S. nuclear arsenal.<sup>151</sup> Additionally, it spoke to the reliance on air power in

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<sup>148</sup>Melanson and Mayers, *Reevaluating Eisenhower*, 53.

<sup>149</sup>*Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>150</sup>William B. Pickett, ed. “George F. Kennan and the Origins of Eisenhower’s New Look: An Oral History of Project Solarium” (Monograph Series 1, Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies, Princeton University, 2004), 9-10.

<sup>151</sup>Bacevich, *The Pentomic Era*, 11-12.

conjunction with the nuclear power. This sought to replace the previous strategy of countering Soviet threats with a conventional proportional response.<sup>152</sup>

In order to frame the significance in terms of the thesis and the decision to escalate in Vietnam, this new threat of “massive retaliation” would be used to mitigate communist aggression where the U.S. was inferior in ground forces. Through a series of regional pacts, such as SEATO, the U.S. attempted to add to its arsenal by putting the initial responsibility for a conventional response on the host nation and regional forces. This “brinkmanship” was designed to protect U.S. global interests abroad and prevent another stalemate war while facilitating access to global trade. It has been reported that this idea of massive retaliation made the Chinese communists wary of fully supporting Ho Chi Minh, due to Dulles’s mantra that retaliation would be at the time and place of the U.S.’s choosing and not necessarily tied directly to the action that caused the retaliation.<sup>153</sup>

Both Dulles and Eisenhower understood the power of the rhetoric, that nuclear weapons are useless unless used in some manner, whether directly employed or indirectly through threats of employment. Dulles cited the end of the Korean War as an example of the Chinese communists understanding Eisenhower’s willingness to expand the conflict under the construct of the New Look policy and its massive retaliation tenet.<sup>154</sup> On the other hand, this also highlights a downfall of the policy, because in order to be effective,

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<sup>152</sup>Melanson and Mayers, *Reevaluating Eisenhower*, 54.

<sup>153</sup>*Ibid.*, 54-55, 156.

<sup>154</sup>Frederick W. Marks, *Power and Peace: The Diplomacy of John Foster Dulles* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), 106.



the adversary must be influenced for deterrence to work. To do this Eisenhower spoke frequently to the American people and to the U.S. Congress in a manner that was construed by many to mean that the U.S. would employ its most lethal weapon against any communist aggression. He publicly maintained that a nuclear weapon was simply another weapon in the arsenal that would be used to match the situation. In other words, the weapons use would not be special circumstance, simply applying a tool to a problem. That might have been intentional ambiguity on Eisenhower and Dulles's part, but they conveyed their point that the U.S. would go to extreme measures to protect the Free World. This ambiguity formed the power behind Dulles's, "maximum deterrent and a bearable cost."<sup>155</sup>

So the question becomes how did the foreign policy of the Eisenhower Administration lead to a commitment of forces to Vietnam? First, the build up to the decision followed along with actions that had been theorize by Kennan and articulated in NSC-68. The most prominent was that the communists would attempt to expand at all costs through a slow and patient exploitation of developing countries. It was later discovered that the Chinese were providing, and in fact, increasing their military and material support to the Viet Minh.<sup>156</sup> Also, that the Chinese had a large hand in the fall of

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<sup>155</sup>Ibid., 106-107.

<sup>156</sup>Mark Atwood Lawrence and Fredrik Logevall, *The First Vietnam War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 240.

Dien Bien Phu by intercepting the plans of French General Navarre and providing them to the Viet Minh.<sup>157</sup>

Second, when French Prime Minister Rene' Mayer visited Eisenhower to consult with him on the situation and request additional assistance, he presented a 18 to 24 month plan reflecting the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff suggestion to accelerate the responsibility to host nation forces and also grow those forces by 40,000 men. Eisenhower and the National Security Council had previously agreed that Indochina was a top priority and would provide additional U.S. assistance if there was a logical French plan presented. Dulles remarked that Indochina was even more important than Korea because the communists were geographically isolated in Korea. That would not be so in Indochina and in April 1953, the Viet Minh invaded Laos with three divisions, that action shattered Eisenhower's faith that the situation was under control and underscored his domino theory. The French plan received support but Eisenhower was bothered that it did not address neutralizing the Chinese communist influence on the Viet Minh. As a result, Eisenhower increased pressure on the French to give independence to the Vietnamese.<sup>158</sup> This was directly in line with U.S. policy regarding diminishing communist influence in developing countries and creating a situation that would force the communists to respond to an action. It was also the genesis for the idea of the SEATO Treaty that would come in 1954.

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<sup>157</sup>Nathan Kuehn, "No Victory in Vietnam: Global Consequences of the 1954 Geneva Conference," 2011, [http://www.lourdes.edu/Portals/0/Files/Academics/ArtsSciences/History/Online\\_Narrative\\_History/ONHJ11summer/PDF/Geneva\\_Conference.pdf](http://www.lourdes.edu/Portals/0/Files/Academics/ArtsSciences/History/Online_Narrative_History/ONHJ11summer/PDF/Geneva_Conference.pdf) (accessed January 15, 2013), 13.

<sup>158</sup>William J. Duiker, *U.S. Containment Policy and the Conflict in Indochina* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 135-137.

The third way the foreign policy led to commitment in Vietnam was in sensing the French might prematurely withdraw, plans were discussed regarding the U.S. reaction. There were three courses of action forwarded that had U.S. deployment at varying degrees and inline with policy, the purpose was; “reducing communist activity to the status of scattered guerilla bands,” and then allowing the host nation to continue the fight. All of the courses of action were based on the conclusions from the Solarium Project, to not attempt to roll back the communists, simply stop them in place and empower the host nation and establishing the resolve of the U.S.<sup>159</sup>

Finally, the situation in Vietnam fit squarely within the foreign policy by outlining a massive retaliation course of action if the Chinese invaded. The recommendation was that the U.S. would apply all measures against the Chinese “mainland” using blockades and air strikes. This was reasoned as the only option the U.S. would have in the event of an invasion. Eisenhower was convinced that the Korean War was settled because of the U.S. threatening rhetoric towards China and therefore viewed massive retaliation as relevant to Vietnam. As such, it was made known to the Chinese that the same terms applied in Vietnam.<sup>160</sup>

After developing the foreign policy, Eisenhower found himself in a position of applying it almost as an algorithm in Indochina to save Vietnam from the Viet Minh. It had been established that Soviet expansion was the biggest threat to the Free World and through the refinements of the Kennan philosophy, NSC-68, and the Solarium Project a strategy to counter that expansion had been developed. In the eyes of the Eisenhower

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<sup>159</sup>Ibid., 138-139.

<sup>160</sup>Ibid., 139

Administration, Vietnam had become the front line for the Cold War and they were going to do everything in their power to prevent it from falling into communist hands and further degrading U.S. influence globally and regionally.

CHAPTER 4  
UNITED STATES AND SOUTH VIETNAMESE  
POLICY INTERSECTIONS

The Eisenhower containment policy laid down an uncompromising view of communism; the U.S. would do everything in its power to prevent communist expansion. The method that Eisenhower would favor to accomplish this was different from Truman, in that Eisenhower wanted less focus on military deterrence through military capabilities and more focus on degrading communist intentions through a comprehensive approach that relied on economic development supported by military action. And taking it one step further, to Eisenhower, military action included the threat of massive retaliation as a legitimate and logical response to communist aggression. Because economic growth was Eisenhower's mainstay, it was important for U.S. economic policy and South Vietnamese economic policy to connect. This connection would ultimately open the door for Catholic influence because it was the foundational policy that the anti-communist stance would grow from.

To understand why South Vietnam and the U.S. were susceptible to influence from the Catholic Church it is important to understand the common economic policy that formed the foundation of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The economic policy of the U.S. and South Vietnam provided the mechanics that support the mutual philosophical goals between the two countries. Prior to World War II the U.S. had little interest in Vietnam. It was a colony of France and the U.S. perspective was that the people needed the French because they were not considered capable of providing

government services for themselves.<sup>161</sup> After World War II, the U.S. interest became more acute because the U.S. needed raw material supplies such as rice and rubber for post war reconstruction to facilitate strategic positioning against the Soviet Union. South Vietnam's economic interests on the other hand were simply to rebuild after the First Indochinese War with France and to establish an economic engine to support the country.

If successful, the strong economic engine would produce a mutual second order effect of countering communist expansion in the region. As such, the economic policy facilitated the main policy alignment of anti-communism between the two countries. The Diem Administration's anti-communist position is discussed thoroughly in chapter 5, but it is fair to say that Diem saw the power of a strong economy as a vital weapon for South Vietnam in its war against the communist. In America, the U.S. Administration subscribed to the "Domino Theory" and the threats a communist victory in the region posed in terms of maintaining strategic capabilities. A strong Vietnamese economy with ample raw material exports would assist U.S. allies rebuilding after World War II and in turn aid in shaping the global landscape in favor of American interests. The prevailing thought in U.S. foreign policy circles at the time was that economic policy based on effective land reform could generate a new middle class that was needed to counter communism.<sup>162</sup>

After World War II as the Cold War began to heat up, the U.S. was forced to face the crisis presented by communist expansion. China fell to the communists in 1948 and to contain future expansion, President Truman decided he would increase support to the

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<sup>161</sup>Kilbride, "Military Assistance Advisory Group--Vietnam (1954-1963)," 7-8.

<sup>162</sup>Scheer, *How the United States Got Involved in Vietnam*, 4.

French war effort in Vietnam because of the Viet Minh's involvement.<sup>163</sup> Therefore, in an indirect manner, Japan became the centerpiece for the defense of Asia because of its industrial and economic potential. It was the most advanced in terms of industrial capability, so it would be able to reconstitute into a functioning economy rapidly and establish a capitalist defense against communism in the region.<sup>164</sup> The U.S. Secretary of State John Forster Dulles and the U.S. Vice President Richard M. Nixon articulated the foundations (without specifics) of this policy in a speech to the Overseas Press Club in New York City, in March 1954. In the speech Nixon said:

It should be emphasized that if Indochina went Communist, Red pressures would increase on Malaya, Thailand and Indonesia and other Asian nations. The main target of Communists in Indochina, as it was in Korea, is Japan. Conquest of areas so vital to Japan's economy would reduce Japan to an economic satellite of the Soviet Union.<sup>165</sup>

Since China had already fallen to the communists, if Southeast Asia was also lost, Japan would have little choice but to engage in trade with the communist countries. This, as Nixon pointed out, would create a situation wherein Japan was overly dependent on a communist power for its economic survival.<sup>166</sup> Hans Morgenthau, an eminent scholar of international politics at the time, noted that the Chinese objectives in the region were parallel to the objectives of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe.<sup>167</sup> These objectives could be viewed as the communist version of George Kennan's concept of a country

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<sup>163</sup>Logevall, *Embers of War*, 211.

<sup>164</sup>Neu, *America's Lost War*, 9, 36, 38.

<sup>165</sup>Gettleman, *Vietnam and America*, 54.

<sup>166</sup>Herring, *America's Longest War*, 13.

<sup>167</sup>Morgenthau, "Vietnam—another Korea," 370.

using its economic power in coordination with its military power for political or philosophical reasons.<sup>168</sup> And of course, to counter this economic influence from China, the U.S. wanted to create and nurture a strong South Vietnamese economy to assist in providing some political legitimacy to oppose Ho Chi Minh's "stature as an anti-colonial hero." The hope was that this could prevent Ho Chi Minh's revolution from taking hold and provide the communists a victory in the region.<sup>169</sup>

The U.S. policy to create and nurture a strong economy in South Vietnam was important to the Diem Administration because it could assist the country in gaining Japan as a strategic trading partner. The potential economic benefits from this partnership could greatly assist in developing a strong stable economy, which would then provide some political stability for Diem. This need for the country to become economically stable was understood in the north and the south. Even Ho Chi Minh himself used this as a point of discussion when he was attempting to gain American support for his actions in 1946.<sup>170</sup> The military situation in South Vietnam would have been considered the most pressing policy issue since the actual integrity of the State was at risk, however, the Diem Administration understood the importance of economic development and its tie to democracy. In a speech before the U.S. Congress in May 1957, Diem referred to economic development as, "the only sound base for democratic political independence." In the same speech he also emphasized the need for all Asian leaders to focus on

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<sup>168</sup>Melanson and Mayers, *Reevaluating Eisenhower*, 33-34.

<sup>169</sup>Latham, "Redirecting the Revolution," 27, 29.

<sup>170</sup>Warner, "The United States and Vietnam 1945-65," 381.



economic planning and that one of the major causes of poverty was that previously, the colonial power withheld technical development.<sup>171</sup>

Diem's speech expressed the policy that had been guiding the South Vietnamese Ministry of Land Development. To build a stronger economy, the ministry began a series of land management reforms in October 1955, when Diem decreed that large landholdings established during the colonial period would be broken up and distributed. The main objective of the decree was to spur economic development by forcing investment in government industries. A pay off design attempted to accomplish this by paying the landowners 10 percent of the value of their property in cash and the remaining 90 percent as bonds in government owned industries or to use as a method to pay taxes. This land reform was key for Diem's economic policy because it provided a foundation of financial stability for the country that allowed the country's exports to begin to enter the international markets.<sup>172</sup> The Diem Administration laid out the program in an official policy called "Ordinance 57."<sup>173</sup> Wade Ladejinsky, an American advisor who had played an important role in the post World War II Japanese land reform efforts, heavily influenced this policy of the Diem Administration. Ladejinsky functioned as the administration's chief economic advisor for land reform in the country and through these efforts; by 1957 the country was able to provide enough rice for its own population and

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<sup>171</sup>History, Art and Archives, "Joint Meeting and Joint Session Addresses before Congress by Foreign Leaders and Dignitaries."

<sup>172</sup>Anthony Trawick Bouscaren, *The Last of the Mandarins: Diem of Vietnam* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1965), 64-65.

<sup>173</sup>Bredo, "Agrarian Reform in Vietnam," 742.

even had excess for export.<sup>174</sup> As prominent economist Leo Cherne put it regarding the Diem Administration's use of economic instruments, they left "the entire economy reinvigorated by Ngo's skillful, tenacious and vigorous government."<sup>175</sup>

There is academic disagreement over the long-term effectiveness of these land development programs;<sup>176</sup> however, the point is that within both administrations economic development was viewed as high priority. The policy was massively subsidized by the U.S. because it complimented U.S. policy regarding containment. Additionally, even though Tokyo recognized South Vietnam in January 1953, there is little evidence that the Diem Administration specifically favored Japan as a trading partner more than any other non-communist country.<sup>177</sup> However, the raw data does show a great reliance on Japan as an export partner and at the peak of their economic relationship in 1961, South Vietnam was able to establish a \$62 million trade advantage.<sup>178</sup> Adjusted for inflation, this equates to almost a \$500 million of buying power in 2013.<sup>179</sup> Therefore, Japan may have been incidental to the U.S. and South Vietnamese policies regarding economic growth, but, as discussed in the previous chapter regarding the outcomes of the Geneva Conference, the policies and fundamental desires of the two countries do not

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<sup>174</sup>Ibid, 64.

<sup>175</sup>Scheer, *How the United States Got Involved in Vietnam*, 51-52.

<sup>176</sup>Odom, *On Internal War*, 58-60.

<sup>177</sup>Hook, *Japan's International Relations*, 177.

<sup>178</sup>Guy Faure and Laurent Schwab, *Japan-Vietnam: A Relation Under Influences* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), 39.

<sup>179</sup>Dollar Times, "Inflation Calculator, <http://www.dollartimes.com/calculators/inflation.htm> (accessed February 13, 2013).

have to perfectly align in order to be mutually beneficial. This emphasis on the importance of economics to counter communism was articulated by the NSC-162/2, when referring to developing countries at the time, outside of the Soviet sphere the document said, “Although largely underdeveloped, their vast manpower, their essential raw materials and their potential for growth as such that their absorption within the Soviet system would greatly, perhaps decisively, alter the world balance of power to our detriment.”<sup>180</sup>

In light of these issues, the similarity in economic policy between the U.S. and South Vietnam is the basic factor or theme that fed the mutual policy of anti-communism. Many prominent journalists and officials of the era felt that unsuccessful land reform would provide a “breeding ground” for growth of communist power in South Vietnam.<sup>181</sup> Because of the fundamentally antagonistic nature between capitalism and communism, as discussed in chapter 3, were it not for the desire and actions of both administrations to develop the South Vietnamese economy, there might have been no anti-communism collaboration. Secondly, if there was no desire to expand a capitalist economy, then there would be little motivation in the U.S. for confrontation with North Vietnam because of Eisenhower’s adoption of the Kennan concept of containment. The attempt at capitalist expansion in South Vietnam served as the start point for both countries official relationship in the context of policy. Because of this policy relationship, how to stop the spread of communism develops into an argument about the degrees of effort and how to

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<sup>180</sup>James M. Carter, *Inventing Vietnam: The United States and State Building, 1954-1968* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 31.

<sup>181</sup>Scheer, *How the United States Got Involved in Vietnam*, 50.

apply support to the economy. The U.S. could have supported a South Vietnamese economy from afar, by imports and subsidies or perhaps absorbing Vietnamese exports into the U.S. economy at the detriment to a non-favored country, so then the question becomes why did the Eisenhower Administration decide to directly intervene in South Vietnam? Chapters 5 and 6 examine whether the Catholic Church provided that additional influence to increase the degree in which the U.S. entered as a belligerent in the conflict between North and South Vietnam.

CHAPTER 5  
SOUTH VIETNAMESE AND CATHOLIC CHURCH  
POLICY INTERSECTIONS

Having gained an understanding of the foundation of the U.S. and South Vietnam's diplomatic relationship after the Geneva Accords, and how the policy of economic expansion predicated the policy of anti-communism, it is important to understand how the Catholic Church interacted with South Vietnam and the U.S. To do so, South Vietnam had three key intersections with the Catholic Church that explain why and how the Church influenced the Diem Administration regarding the struggle with North Vietnam. The first key intersection is the Catholicism of the Diem Administration itself, the second is through the massive influx of refugees from North to South Vietnam to escape real or perceived persecution, and the last is the same philosophical view of communism between the Vatican and the Diem Administration. These three factors tie the Catholic Church to the South Vietnamese government and provide an explanation of how the Church influenced the government to meet Vatican objectives in the region.

In examining the South Vietnamese government there can be no appreciation of how it operated without a clear understanding of the Diem Administration, which was composed mainly of the Ngo family.<sup>182</sup> The Ngo family had a steep history of nationalism and Catholicism and for about 1000 years the family was known to have defended Vietnam against Chinese aggression. They also suffered brutal forms of religious persecution culminating in 1870, when about 100 members of the Ngo family

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<sup>182</sup>Carter, *Inventing Vietnam*, 59.

were surrounded in their Catholic Church and burned alive.<sup>183</sup> The incident was carried out by a mob of Buddhists because the Catholic minority was seen as aligning with the ever stronger French forces that were considered a “foreign oppressor.”<sup>184</sup> The most influential member of the Ngo family was their father, who had served as the Court Chamberlain under Emperor Than Thai.<sup>185</sup> As a 1st Class Mandarin, Ngo Dinh Kha held considerable influence at the imperial court.<sup>186</sup> As a father, he personally supervised the education of all nine of his children ensuring they would carry on his philosophies and attributes. Because of Kha’s bitter opposition to the French foreign occupiers, he resigned his position rather than collaborate with them; an attitude of the French that his children would eventually inherit.<sup>187</sup> Kha’s third son Diem would follow in his footsteps religiously and politically and as a young man, Diem demonstrated a snapshot of his dedication and unwavering personality by dropping out of the seminary because he felt it was too flexible. He turned down a scholarship to study in France because he did not like the French and eventually graduated first in his class at Hanoi’s School of Public Administration and Law. Diem’s dedication and competence showed, as he worked his way up through the Mandarin ranks. While serving in various local posts such as

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<sup>183</sup>Bouscaren, *The Last of the Mandarins*, 13.

<sup>184</sup>Seth Jacobs, *America’s Miracle Man in Vietnam: Ngo Dinh Diem, Religion, Race, and U.S. Intervention in Southeast Asia, 1950-1957* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 18.

<sup>185</sup>J. Lawton Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 388.

<sup>186</sup>Edward Miller, “Vision, Power and Agency: The Ascent of Ngô Đình Diêm, 1945-54,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 35, no. 3 (2004): 435.

<sup>187</sup>Bouscaren, *The Last of the Mandarins*, 14.

provincial chief, he first came into contact with communist agents spreading propaganda. Diem assisted the French in exposing and suppressing them because he despised the Marxist doctrine of social revolution and atheism more than he despised the French.<sup>188</sup> Eventually Diem was selected as the Minister of Interior and Secretary General of the French-Vietnamese Council of Reforms.<sup>189</sup> However, after all of his recommendations for reform were rejected, he publicly resigned, decrying that the Emperor was a French tool. After the Viet Minh murdered his brother and nephew in 1945 for opposing communism and after receiving a death sentence of his own in 1950, Diem left the country.<sup>190</sup>

When Diem left Vietnam he ended up in the U.S. where he gained the support of prominent Catholic writers, government leaders, and most notably, Cardinal Francis Spellman, the Archbishop of New York. These political connections would eventually result in pressure on Bao Dai to appoint him as the Premier to South Vietnam after the partition from the Geneva Accords. The extent of this support is covered in more detail in chapter 6, however, when Diem returned to Vietnam in July 1954, he quickly moved to consolidate his administration's power.<sup>191</sup> To do this Diem selected members of his family to be a ruling cabal. His brother Thuc (who was a Catholic Bishop) was charged

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<sup>188</sup>Seth Jacobs, *America's Miracle Man in Vietnam*, 28.

<sup>189</sup>Ngọc Thành Hoàng and Thị Nhân Đức Thân, *President Ngô Đình Diệm and the US: His Overthrow and Assassination* (San Jose, CA: Tuấn-Yên & Quân-Việt Mai-Nam Publishers, 2001), 19.

<sup>190</sup>Jacobs, *Miracle Man in Vietnam*, 28-31.

<sup>191</sup>Herbert Y. Schandler, "Ngo Dinh Diem: Washington's Frankenstein Monster?" *Vietnam* 19, no. 3 (October 2006): 34.

with garnering support of the Catholic community. His brother Luyen was the Ambassador to the United Kingdom, his brother Can held no political office but was influential politically in Annam, the central region of Vietnam and would later head one of the major political parties in the National Assembly. His sister-in-law was his official hostess and “constantly meddled in politics” and her father was the Ambassador to the U.S., with one uncle being the Foreign Minister and another serving as Minister of Public Works.<sup>192</sup> Lastly, his brother Nhu was probably his most influential advisor, directing internal security.<sup>193</sup>

The Diem Administration was homogeneous, brutal, and reluctant to accept advice from outside sources. Additionally, Diem himself believed that he ruled by a “mandate from heaven.”<sup>194</sup> In Diem’s defense however, a leader of a regime under threat is rarely willing or practically able to decentralize the power base, since a strong central government is needed to defeat or deter the perceived threat.<sup>195</sup> As such, it is fair to conclude that due to the personal interconnectivities of the Diem Administration and the method in which it operated, any personal views of the members should be interpreted as official government policy. The U.S. quietly accepted this because there was some doubt about whether South Vietnam was ready for democracy at the time.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>192</sup>Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography*, 388, 389.

<sup>193</sup>Schandler, “Ngo Dinh Diem: Washington’s Frankenstein Monster?” 34.

<sup>194</sup>Ibid.

<sup>195</sup>Odom, *On Internal War*, 58.

<sup>196</sup>Jacobs, *America’s Miracle Man in Vietnam*, 25-26.



Once in office, Diem faced a series of internal power challenges and personal attacks from military leaders who thought he was politically weak because of the ongoing political and criminal challenges posed by various armed groups within the country. These challenges were somewhat sanctioned by Bao Dai, who had never liked Diem but was pressured to use him by the U.S. In a move to fully consolidate power, Diem held an election and defeated Bao Dai for leadership of the country with a 98 percent vote.<sup>197</sup> This total control of the country facilitated what became the first link of the Catholic Church and the “Diemocracy” through the administration’s political policy.

The Ngo’s sanctioned “Personalism” as the official political philosophy of South Vietnam in an attempt to foster support for the administration throughout the country.<sup>198</sup> Less than 10 percent of the population of South Vietnam was Catholic but Catholics were occupying a majority of the government positions, down to the provincial level.<sup>199</sup> As a result, it was important that the Diem Administration establish a common thread with the people. To do this they needed a philosophy that appealed to as many people as possible while still holding on to the Ngo family principles. Personalism met this task because Nhu (who had extensively studied Personalism while in France) thought that this ideology, although developed by Catholic philosopher Emmanuel Mounier, would appeal to all Vietnamese.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>197</sup>Bouscaren, *The Last of the Mandarins*, 54.

<sup>198</sup>Philip E. Catton, *Diem’s Final Failure: Prelude to America’s War in Vietnam* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 42.

<sup>199</sup>Robert Scigliano, “Vietnam: Politics and Religion,” *Asian Survey* 4, no. 1 (1964): 666.

<sup>200</sup>Miller, “Vision, Power and Agency,” 448-450.

To appeal to the Vietnamese people, Nhu predicted that Personalism would bridge the gap between communism and capitalism by finding a “third way.” The main point for the Diem Administration was that it was a Catholic philosophy, and spoke to the hatred of communism; however, it fit the rest of the country because within this construct, it espoused an emphasis on community over individualism. It was thought by the administration that this would appeal to the people, while establishing a Catholic identity for the country.<sup>201</sup> By 1957, the “Personalist Revolution” was officially embraced and the administration, guided by Nhu, who continued to refine it to fit the politics of South Vietnam. The adoption of Personalism was directly reflective of the Catholic influence over the members of the Diem Administration from its inception and represents the most basic philosophical underpinning the administration tried to base its decisions upon.<sup>202</sup>

The second intersection between Catholicism and the Diem Administration, where Catholic influence provided a guiding force within the administration, was with the massive influx of Catholic refugees from North Vietnam. Many of the predominately Catholic districts of Vietnam had ended on the north side of the partition after the Geneva Accords split the country at the 17th parallel. As a result, only about 450,000 of Vietnam’s 1,450,000 Catholics remained in the South.<sup>203</sup> Since South Vietnam had such a small number of Catholics, it became imperative that the Diem Administration expand

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<sup>201</sup>Catton, *Diem’s Final Failure*, 41-42.

<sup>202</sup>Miller, “Vision, Power and Agency,” 457-458.

<sup>203</sup>Seth Jacobs, *Cold War Mandarin: Ngo Dinh Diem and the Origins of America’s War in Vietnam, 1950-1963* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 45.

its base of support.<sup>204</sup> To do so they benefitted from the provision in the Geneva Accords (which South Vietnam was not a signatory of) that the Vietnamese population could move to either side of the 17th Parallel during a resettlement period. Soon hundreds of thousands of North Vietnamese Catholics were scrambling to reach South Vietnam and avoid communist persecution.<sup>205</sup> The manner in which these Catholics left the North and were resettled in the South was guided not only directly by Catholic clergy, but also the Catholic views of the Diem Administration.

With massive support from the U.S., approximately 900,000 refugees left North Vietnam; of those approximately 600,000 were Catholics. To directly guide the resettlement, in 1954, Thuc flew to North Vietnam to meet with the bishops there and lay the groundwork for the propaganda message used to urge the Catholics south. The CIA assisted Thuc in developing the messages, which were delivered by the various North Vietnamese parish priests. One such propaganda message was that the Virgin Mary had already fled south and they should follow her.<sup>206</sup>

The CIA was involved in the propaganda and resettlement effort because an effective resettlement was important, since a positive outcome could be used as pro-Diem propaganda by demonstrating the effectiveness of the South Vietnamese government in a crisis. There was also an expectation that, due to their Catholicism, the refugees would

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<sup>204</sup>Kenneth E. Kaizer, "In 1954, the CIA-Backed Operation Exodus Helped Move Thousands of Catholics from North to South Vietnam," *Vietnam* 14, no. 2 (August 2001): 58.

<sup>205</sup>Trần Thi Liên, "The Catholic Question in North Vietnam: From Polish Sources, 1954-56," *Cold War History* 5, no. 4 (2005): 427.

<sup>206</sup>Kaizer, "In 1954, the CIA-Backed Operation Exodus Helped Move Thousands of Catholics from North to South Vietnam," 61.

provide a foundation of support for the Diem Administration. The Church was directly involved from top to bottom in the operation. At the national level, Bishop Pham Ngoc Chi, who was the former Bishop of Bui Chu in North Vietnam, was responsible for the resettlement and at the local level, parish priests provided administrative support and leadership to the groups of refugees, which mainly centered around their former parishes in North Vietnam.<sup>207</sup>

The important ties between the Church and the Diem Administration, regarding the resettlement, came about in three methods. First, simply having a Catholic kindred spirit in Diem as the leader of South Vietnam is cited as a reason many Catholics moved.<sup>208</sup> The second method tying the Diem Administration and the Church was through the land distribution that was such a key aspect to the Diem Administrations economic policy. Catholic refugees in many cases were given plots of land rich with raw materials that would allow them to quickly establish communities that were frequently led by the parish priest from North Vietnam.<sup>209</sup> Over time, the refugees eventually became highly represented in the South Vietnamese military, civil service, academia, and professional circles.<sup>210</sup> Since the Diem Administration thought Catholics were more loyal, positioning within the government was most evident in the political and military

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<sup>207</sup>Ronald Bruce Frankum, *Operation Passage to Freedom: The United States Navy in Vietnam, 1954-1955* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2007), 102-4, 107.

<sup>208</sup>Peter Hansen, “Bắc Đì Cù: Catholic Refugees from the North of Vietnam, and Their Role in the Southern Republic, 1954–1959,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 4, no. 3 (2009): 186.

<sup>209</sup>*Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>210</sup>Hansen, “Bắc Đì Cù: Catholic Refugees from the North of Vietnam,” 175.

functions that were used to promote internal unity and minimize threats to the administration's power.<sup>211</sup>

The third tie between the Catholic Church and the Diem Administration regarding resettlement was the efforts in late 1954 to late 1955 to ensure that Catholics were moved into areas that would provide long-term, political and security functions for the administration. One example of how they accomplished this was by granting about 25,000 hectares to Bishop Pham Ngoc Chi in August 1954, who then shaped the final resettlements of Catholics into locations to achieve the desired security goals of the administration.<sup>212</sup> It is key to note that prior to moving south, Bishop Chi maintained and led a Catholic militia that had been in combat with communist forces for over four years and some members of his Catholic militia became Diem's palace guards.<sup>213</sup> No doubt this was done to take advantage of Catholic loyalties to the administration and to exploit their anti-communist views.

The methods by which Bishop Chi and the administration resettled Catholics were as effective as they were discriminatory. In one instance, Catholic refugee settlements were positioned along the banks of 18 of the 19 subsidiary canals that fed a main canal flowing into the Mekong Delta. This effectively allowed the Catholic communities to control trade and the local economy. Another method was the resettling of refugees to areas in the highlands that had previously been closed. The administration wanted to spur

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<sup>211</sup>Christopher J. Kauffman, "Politics, Programs, and Protests: Catholic Relief Services in Vietnam, 1954-1975," *Catholic Historical Review* 91, no. 2 (2005): 232.

<sup>212</sup>Hansen, "Bắc Đì Cù: Catholic Refugees from the North of Vietnam," 194.

<sup>213</sup>Kaizer, "In 1954, the CIA-Backed Operation Exodus Helped Move Thousands of Catholics from North to South Vietnam," 58, 61.

economic development that would support the Catholic communities in locations to act as bulwarks against communist insurgency; this economic development was a key ingredient in the administration's economic policy previously discussed in chapter 4. Lastly, many Catholic refugee settlements were eventually placed in key strategic locations surrounding the capital of Saigon itself. This provided a "ring of steel" to protect the administration.<sup>214</sup>

These are three clear examples of the collaboration of the Catholic Church and the Diem Administration in settling Catholic refugees. By settling the refugees from North Vietnam, both the Church and South Vietnam used the situation to gain a political, economic, military, and spiritual advantage against the communists. It provided for the Diem Administration "a core of zealous followers" from which they attempted to shape the strategic landscape to support their political vision.<sup>215</sup>

The third linkage between the Catholic Church and South Vietnam was the shared anti-communist outlook. The attitude of the Church during the time of the Cold War can be traced back to Pope Pius XI who reigned from 1922 to 1939. The Church was opposed to the Marxist concepts of materialism and denounced the actions of the atheist Bolsheviks. However, because there were no expansion tendencies of the Bolsheviks, who were a part of a larger political party, and because Roman Catholics in Russia were a small minority, the Church did not forcefully confront early communist Russia because there was not enough reward for the amount of effort required. In fact, the Russian

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<sup>214</sup>Hansen, "Bắc Đì Cú: Catholic Refugees from the North of Vietnam," 195-198.

<sup>215</sup>Kaizer, "In 1954, the CIA-Backed Operation Exodus Helped Move Thousands of Catholics from North to South Vietnam," 61.

government collaborated with the Church to operate and even to recruit converts from the Russian Orthodox Church. That all changed when Stalin came to power in 1928 and began persecutions of Catholics as well as practicing communism, which the Church considered a militant form of socialism. This changed the view point of the Church at the time, and on March 19, 1930, Pius XI warned Catholics of the potential attractiveness of communism due to the devastating economic effects of the Great Depression. He “turned his full scorn of Vatican disapproval on Communists” and called for their defeat.<sup>216</sup>

Expanding on Pius XI’s Vatican scorn, in 1949 the Catholic message continued to harden under Pope Pius XII when he issued a “Decree against Communism” where he excommunicated any Catholics who were willingly associated with or facilitated communism.<sup>217</sup> The conflict continued and in the mid 1950s when Poland and Hungary fell to communism the Church was prevented from ministering to its followers. Eventually the communist governments whose countries had large populations of Catholics established a policy that those who followed the guidance of Rome would be considered traitors.<sup>218</sup> Because of a fear of more losses the Church might suffer through

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<sup>216</sup>Peter C. Kent, *The Lonely Cold War of Pope Pius XII The Roman Catholic Church and the Division of Europe, 1943-1950* (Montréal, Que: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 3-12.

<sup>217</sup>“Decree against communism-Pope Pius XII in 1949,” *SMC News*, 23 March 2009.

<sup>218</sup>GlobalSecurity.org, “Pius XII and Anti-Communism,” Last modified 8 May 2011, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/europe/va-pope-pius-xii-communism.htm> (accessed February 24, 2013).

the expansion of communism, Pius XII ordered Cardinal Spellman to “encourage American commitment in Vietnam.”<sup>219</sup>

Understanding the global concerns of Pius XII and the fundamental antithetical nature of the relationship between Catholicism, the Catholic Church, and communism influenced the Diem Administration. As previously discussed, key members of the Diem Administration were raised strict Catholics and those members who were not part of the family were recruited in part, from the Catholic refugees. The family members had significant input into the actions of the administration as a whole, their viewpoints were shaped by their Catholic faith and their decisions were informed by those viewpoints. They were able to achieve international support from the U.S. through leveraging Spellman and his political connections, which is discussed more thoroughly in chapter 6.

The three connecting points between Catholicism and the Diem Administration in South Vietnam provided Catholic religious influence on the administration in its decisions to combat communism. The first connection is the Diem Administration adoption of the Catholic philosophy of Personalism to provide a common framework for making decisions, unifying the country, and gaining the political support of the majority Buddhist population in the country. The second is through the massive influx of refugees from North to South Vietnam. The Vietnamese Catholic Church was instrumental in the refugees’ leadership and where the settlements were placed around the country that would support the Diem Administration politically, militarily, and economically. The Vietnamese Church also provided a loyal supply of government, military, academic, and

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<sup>219</sup>John Cooney, *The American Pope: The Life and Times of Francis Cardinal Spellman* (New York: Times Books, 1984), 241-242.



economic leaders from the population of refugees. The final and least tangible but possibly the most powerful manner in which the Church exercised influence over the Diem Administration was a deep rooted hatred of communism and an unwavering willingness to confront it anywhere in the world.

CHAPTER 6  
UNITED STATES AND CATHOLIC CHURCH  
POLICY INTERSECTIONS

Previous chapters provided the background on the formation of U.S. foreign policy regarding communist containment during the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations. They discussed how the foreign policy was applied, specifically to the economic policy regarding South Vietnam, and how both countries policies were linked. This linkage served as the foundation for all other commonalities regarding the conflict with North Vietnam and the effort to prevent the spread of communism in the region. The chapters examined why the decisions were made regarding Vietnam, however they did not address how they were made and what influenced the viewpoints that fed the decision making process in the Eisenhower Administration. As such, this chapter examines how the U.S. policies intersected with those of the Catholic Church regarding Vietnam. There are two key intersections between the U.S. and the Catholic Church that influenced Eisenhower's decisions to directly intervene in Vietnam. The first was the mutual philosophical view of the Eisenhower Administration and the Catholic Church regarding communism, and the second was the political pressure on the administration from Cardinal Francis Spellman as he implemented Vatican policy toward Vietnam. These two intersections provided substantial influence in the decision by the Eisenhower Administration to commit forces to combat communism in Vietnam.

The first key intersection was a mutual philosophical view on the spread of communism. John Foster Dulles most aptly represents this view as it applies to U.S. foreign policy. Eisenhower was a believer in the concept of finding the right person and

putting them in a position to execute his administrative vision. This led to the development of his practice to use a, “small group of versatile trouble shooters who could move with knowledge and assurance into any problem that happened to be pressing.” This idea of individual focal points, to provide narrow and specific influence to shape issues, was no more evident than in Eisenhower’s selection of Dulles as his Secretary of State.<sup>220</sup> The two men had been engaging in long and detailed foreign policy discussions since early 1952, and it is clear that Dulles was firmly in charge of and in total synchronization with Eisenhower regarding foreign policy. According to Sherman Adams, Eisenhower’s White House Chief of Staff for over five years, referring to Dulles, “there was never much doubt about who was responsible for the foreign policy of the United States” and that Dulles was the only person in the government who spoke frequently to the President on the telephone.<sup>221</sup> In light of this first person account of the relationship, it is fair to deduce that Dulles’s views and opinions shaped and informed Eisenhower’s decisions to a great degree and that Dulles was the primary and most trusted advocate for the entire Eisenhower Administration regarding foreign relations. Dulles’s personal and professional views should be considered in line with the desires of the administration as a whole and therefore his words and actions are the main focus in this chapter. As such, Dulles is one of the key linkages between the U.S. and the Catholic Church on policy towards Vietnam.

Dulles’s link to the Catholic Church started years before entering office. He was born the son a Presbyterian Minister and a descendant of multiple generations who served

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<sup>220</sup>Adams, *Firsthand Report*, 54.

<sup>221</sup>*Ibid.*, 73, 87.

as ministers and missionaries overseas. Dulles was raised in a small town in upstate New York with his brother and three sisters and his upbringing was immersed in religion, which dominated all aspects of his daily life. Additionally, his grandfather was a career diplomat who rose to the rank of Secretary of State under President Benjamin Harrison. Both his father and his grandfather would ultimately have a profound influence on Dulles. He spent hours at home and at his father's church learning the philosophical foundations of Christianity and he spent weeks and sometimes months at his grandfather's house in Washington, learning about the world and how the countries and cultures all interact at the global level.<sup>222</sup> The result over time was the man would become President Eisenhower's most trusted diplomat. He was responsible for all aspects of foreign policy with opinions shaped and informed by this eclectic mix of small town rural lifestyle, with an incredibly powerful religious foundation, and the incidental education of world affairs from his grandfather.<sup>223</sup>

The coaching and pedigree from his grandfather certainly helped Dulles catapult up the professional ranks, but it is his religious foundation that formed the basis of what would become his philosophical outlook regarding the spread of communism. Dulles was an unwavering, almost visceral anti-communist, who believed that communism at its root was evil because he felt within it "individuals have no God-given rights, and the individual personality has no sacredness." Because of the materialistic nature of communism he says, "What is important is the material welfare of the social group. So

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<sup>222</sup>Ronald W. Pruessen, *John Foster Dulles: The Road to Power* (New York: Free Press, 1982), 2-13.

<sup>223</sup>Thomas John Kane, "The Missionary Theme in the Rhetoric of John Foster Dulles" (Thesis (Ph. D.)--University of Pittsburgh, 1968), 7.

any individuals who may have desires or beliefs that cut across the welfare of the group should be removed.”<sup>224</sup> This belief shaped everything about Dulles’s worldview during the post World War II struggle to establish a global balance between the U.S. and the Soviets. It was reinforced in a political manner by the conservative wing of the Republican Party, inspired by Senator McCarthy’s public criticism of the Truman Administration’s “loss” of China to the communists.<sup>225</sup>

Dulles’s views did not stand alone in the administration; they were echoed in President Eisenhower’s Domino Theory. The U.S. wanted to establish a world order in which capitalism would be the driving force. As the most powerful capitalist country on earth, the U.S. would naturally assume the mantle of leadership and be able to steer the course globally.<sup>226</sup> Two examples of this were in Europe and in Southeast Asia. In Europe, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (also known as NATO) was established to counter the spread of communism. The U.S. provided support to the French in Vietnam, in part to facilitate a victory that would free combat power in support of NATO.<sup>227</sup> The religious component to this was that the expansion of communism in Eastern Europe left millions of Catholics under atheist rule. Concurrently, communist political parties were getting stronger in Catholic countries, thus threatening to gain

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<sup>224</sup>John Foster Dulles, *War or Peace* (New York: Macmillan, 1950), 8.

<sup>225</sup>Pruessen, *John Foster Dulles: The Road to Power*, 436.

<sup>226</sup>Kolko and Kolko, *The Limits of Power*, 707-711.

<sup>227</sup>*Ibid.*, 684.

control of more of the continent.<sup>228</sup> In Southeast Asia, the fears were very theoretical in nature; the anticipated dominos were Indonesia, Burma, and Thailand, which if they fell, could give momentum to the communist movement to gain a foothold in India.<sup>229</sup> This would give the Soviets regional geographic advantages over the allies and potentially effect lines of communication.<sup>230</sup> In a practical manner, as discussed in chapter 4, it would frustrate the U.S. effort to rebuild Japan as a capitalist safeguard in the region.

Dulles's worldview intersects with the Catholic Church in the rejection of communism and the desire to stop its spread. Although Dulles himself was not a Catholic, he was a "moral absolutist," and an elder in the Presbyterian Church; he shared a common interest with the Catholic Church in that he was going to do what was needed to prevent the spread of the atheistic communism.<sup>231</sup> In his book *War or Peace*, Dulles says that, "Soviet Communism starts with an atheistic, Godless premise. Everything else flows from that premise."<sup>232</sup> This was directly antagonistic to the manner in which Dulles saw problems in the world.

It was not, however, Dulles's Christian views alone that drove the policy intersects with the Catholic Church. Similarly, Eisenhower believed that, "we are a

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<sup>228</sup>Avro Manhattan, *Vietnam: Why Did We Go?* (Chino, CA: Chick Publications, 1984), 21.

<sup>229</sup>Duiker, *U.S. Containment Policy and the Conflict in Indochina*, 136-137.

<sup>230</sup>Kolko and Kolko, *The Limits of Power*, 685.

<sup>231</sup>Louis B. Zimmer, *The Vietnam War Debate: Hans J. Morgenthau and the Attempt to Halt the Drift into Disaster* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 22.

<sup>232</sup>John Foster Dulles, *War or Peace* (New York: Macmillan, 1957), 8.

product and a representation of the Judaic-Christian civilization.”<sup>233</sup> This mentality formed the foundation of Eisenhower’s view toward global intervention and was synchronous with Dulles’s view that there should be, “Christian morality to the conduct of international relations.”<sup>234</sup> Additionally, according to Seth Jacobs, “the evidence is overwhelming that Eisenhower encouraged the nationwide turn toward God.” During Eisenhower’s first term, he was instrumental in supporting the addition of “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance, “In God We Trust” on U.S. currency and he established the tradition of having prayer breakfasts at the White House. Eisenhower believed that “There can be no question about the American system being the translation into the political world of a deeply felt religious faith.”<sup>235</sup> Although there is academic debate about the sincerity of Eisenhower’s commitment to religion, his words must be taken at face value.<sup>236</sup> Those words might not have been valuable in terms of clearly defining his beliefs, but they do display Eisenhower’s use of religion in the implementation of governance.

The religious context of Dulles’s and Eisenhower’s political philosophy aligned with the Catholic Church because the Church was in the midst of an anti-communist movement, as discussed in chapter 5. Regarding the Eisenhower Administration, the relevant component was the American Catholic Church’s concerted effort to link

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<sup>233</sup>Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 132.

<sup>234</sup>*Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>235</sup>Seth Jacobs, “‘Our System Demands the Supreme Being’: The U.S. Religious Revival and the ‘Dien Experiment,’ 1954-55,” *Diplomatic History* 25, no. 4 (Fall 2001): 593, 594.

<sup>236</sup>Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith*, 442.

spirituality to American patriotism and anti-communism in the early stages of the Cold War.<sup>237</sup> This was useful to the Eisenhower Administration as it mobilized support against communism in Southeast Asia. Eisenhower, and certainly Dulles, understood the power of the American Catholic Church and sought to use its support in the struggle against communism. The complimentary aspects of the Church's position and the administration's position regarding communism, provided a scenario in which the Church simply needed a mechanism of political influence in order to pursue its own goals in Vietnam.

During the 1950s, anti-communism in the American Catholic Church was at its height. It was a dominant theme of the Catholic media and all Catholics clearly understood the Church's position regarding communism.<sup>238</sup> Socially, the Church was primarily an institution of European immigrants, with members who had a tendency to band together.<sup>239</sup> As such, in 1952 the "Catholic vote" was at its peak strength according to a 1956 statistical analysis of voting records.<sup>240</sup> Catholics also tended to turn out in higher proportion than non-Catholics and in 1952, they represented a "critical decline" in Democratic Party support, which helped then Republican candidate Eisenhower win the presidential election; in short they were the swing vote. Church officials guided this

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<sup>237</sup>Steel, "In the Name of the Father," 3.

<sup>238</sup>Charles E. Curran, *The Social Mission of the U.S. Catholic Church A Theological Perspective* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 28-29.

<sup>239</sup>Andrew M. Greeley, "The Sociology of American Catholics," *Annual Review of Sociology* 5 (1979): 91.

<sup>240</sup>The Catholic Vote in 1952 and 1956, [http://peaceinstitute.sargentshriver.org/files/1956\\_-\\_THE\\_CATHOLIC\\_VOTE\\_IN\\_1952\\_AND\\_1956.pdf](http://peaceinstitute.sargentshriver.org/files/1956_-_THE_CATHOLIC_VOTE_IN_1952_AND_1956.pdf) (access March 12, 2013).



group mentality of the Catholic voters by shaping the messages to the individual parishioners in the pews on Sunday. In the 1950s, those messages revolved around anti-communism and Catholics were reminded on a near constant basis of the evil of communism. These messages came from individuals ranging from local parish priests, all the way up to Monsignor (later Bishop) Fulton Sheen on his weekly television show *a Life is Worth Living*.<sup>241</sup> Not only was Sheen's show the highest rated television series in the mid-1950s but the media in general painted a flattering picture of Catholicism during the time.<sup>242</sup>

The power of the Catholic Church in America was at its peak in the early 1950s. Author Charles R. Morris opines, "No other institution could match its impact on politics, unions, movies or even popular kitsch." The Church's growth was primarily in large urban centers like New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit, and Pittsburgh.<sup>243</sup> This population growth within the major cities coincided with a time in U.S. history when the politics and policies of those large populations dominated local trends.<sup>244</sup> These factors combined to provide a setting where the political power of the Church was a force to be reckoned with. The manifestation of that power fell to Cardinal Francis Spellman, the Archbishop of New York.

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<sup>241</sup>Patrick Allitt, "Catholic Anti-Communism," 4 April 2009, [www.catholiccity.com/commentary/allitt/05744.html](http://www.catholiccity.com/commentary/allitt/05744.html) (accessed March 12, 2013).

<sup>242</sup>Jacobs, "Our System Demands the Supreme Being," 602.

<sup>243</sup>Charles R. Morris, *American Catholic: The Saints and Sinners Who Built America's Most Powerful Church* (New York: Times Books, 1997), 247, 223.

<sup>244</sup>Jacobs, "Our System Demands the Supreme Being," 602.

No one in the American Catholic Church was more politically powerful than Spellman. His Archdiocese was described as, “the most important See in the world other than Rome” which made Spellman one of, if not the most powerful Catholic in the U.S.; he was politically active and internationally connected in this capacity.<sup>245</sup> In 1925, Spellman began his ascent within the Catholic hierarchy as an Attaché in the Vatican’s Secretariat of State.<sup>246</sup> It was during this assignment that he began laying the foundation for his political influence in the U.S. by seeking out and courting wealthy Americans who were visiting the Vatican. He especially sought out audiences with U.S. politicians and reportedly promoted himself forcefully enough that it caused a rift with his peers at the time. Eventually, he caught the attention of the Pope Pius XI and by 1929 the Pope began to rely on Spellman for personal favors, which resulted in expanding Spellman’s duties and trust.<sup>247</sup> One of his duties in Rome was as a Privy Chamberlain of His Holiness, a position of extraordinary access to the highest leaders of the Church.<sup>248</sup>

After his time in Rome where he laid the foundation for his political influence, he found himself back in the U.S. where he was elected Titular Bishop of Sila and appointed Auxiliary of Boston on July 30, 1932. In April 1939, he was appointed as the Archbishop of New York and later the same year the Military Vicar of U.S. Armed Forces.<sup>249</sup> It was

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<sup>245</sup>Cooney, *The American Pope*, 211.

<sup>246</sup>The Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, “Biographical Dictionary,” <http://www2.fiu.edu/~mirandas/bios-s.htm> (accessed March 11, 2013).

<sup>247</sup>Cooney, *The American Pope*, 36-43.

<sup>248</sup>The Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church.

<sup>249</sup>*Ibid.*

in his capacity as the Military Vicar that Spellman met multiple Allied leaders who would go on to become influential political personalities. Most notably were Dwight Eisenhower, Mark Clark, George Patton, and Douglas MacArthur; Spellman would continue to build a relationship with MacArthur during his time in Korea.

Military leaders were not the only powerful people Spellman built relationships with. While visiting London in March 1943, he dined with Prime Minister Churchill and assisted him and President Roosevelt in negotiations with the French Prime Minister Charles de Gaulle. It seemed there was a concern by Roosevelt and Churchill that the French were not maintaining a unified front representing the Free French within the Allied alliance. Roosevelt asked Spellman to intervene to “shape up the general,” which he did leading to de Gaulle falling in line publicly. Spellman was also still a trusted agent for the Vatican and the Pope directly. In May 1943, the Vatican used Spellman to pressure Roosevelt to intervene and attempt to secure the release of Italian priests who were being held by the British in North Africa. Because Roosevelt felt he owed Spellman “favors,” he agreed to press Churchill on the matter.<sup>250</sup>

Spellman’s influence on President Truman to prevent the appointment and subsequent confirmation of an Ambassador to the Holy See is another example of his power. Although publicly in support, Spellman was against the appointment because that person would potentially diminish Spellman’s political influence in the U.S. As a result of Spellman’s private opposition, Truman nominated General Mark Clark in October 1951. He picked Clark, in part because he knew that the Senate would never approve him due to his wartime use of the 36th Texas Division at the Rapido River crossing in Italy in

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<sup>250</sup>Cooney, *The American Pope*, 129-131, 132.

January 1944. Thus, Truman was able to compromise by appearing to be independent of Spellman's influence, but shrewdly not offending the man.<sup>251</sup> The result was that there was no U.S. representative to the Vatican during the Truman Administration and no formal diplomatic relations.<sup>252</sup> This continued into the Eisenhower Administration where the President, after pressure from Protestant groups, refused any public association with the Church beyond ceremonial events.<sup>253</sup> The result was that Spellman maintained his influence and his behind the scenes actions were an indicator of how he saw his role in regards to interactions with the governmental leaders in the U.S. He was the leading Church figure who would answer to no other Catholic leader in the U.S.

Operating from the New York Chancery, which was referred to as the "Powerhouse," politicians from both parties competed for his good graces. Additionally as the Military Vicar, he was able to remain influential throughout the world as he travelled to various military installations. Many thought he could be the first American Pope but the joke was that this would be unacceptable because it would diminish his authority. In this powerful role, he could directly advocate against communism and the "satanic Soviet sycophants" by leveraging his political influence to support the effort in Vietnam.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>251</sup>Ibid., 128, 129, 212.

<sup>252</sup>Kristin E. Heyer, Mark J. Rozell, and Michael A. Genovese, *Catholics and Politics The Dynamic Tension between Faith and Power* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008), 179.

<sup>253</sup>J. Sabes, "Popes and Presidents: The Relationship of Domestic Politics and Religion in International Affairs," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 45, no. 1 (2007): 53.

<sup>254</sup>Jacobs, *America's Miracle Man in Vietnam*, 82.

Spellman's anti-communist efforts were in complete alignment with Pope Pius XII and Vatican policy. The Pope supported the Diem Administration because Bishop Ngo Dinh Thuc and the Pope had a previous relationship from his service in Rome, and because the Pope was concerned by the losses the Church would suffer through the expansion of communism.<sup>255</sup> The Vatican Constitution says that, "the Supreme Pontiff, Sovereign of Vatican City-State, possesses the fullness of legislative, executive, and judicial powers."<sup>256</sup> Therefore as the Pontiff, Pius XII had the ultimate power to dictate Vatican policy. Using his power, "He turned to Spellman to encourage American commitment to Vietnam."<sup>257</sup> This was the second key intersection between the Catholic Church and the U.S. that influenced the Eisenhower Administration's decision to directly intervene in Vietnam.

The sequence of events that would eventually lead to Spellman fulfilling the Pope's wishes and encouraging more American involvement began in 1950 when Ngo Dinh Diem found himself in an untenable position of either supporting the French in Vietnam or the communists. Unable to find a lesser of two evils, Diem and his brother Bishop Ngo Dinh Thuc, who would become the Archbishop of Hue, left Vietnam. They met Wesley Fishel while travelling in Japan. Fishel, at the time was working for the CIA and persuaded Diem to travel to the U.S. to garner support for his nationalist cause.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>255</sup>Cooney, *The American Pope*, 241, 242.

<sup>256</sup>Sabes, "Popes and Presidents," 47.

<sup>257</sup>Cooney, *The American Pope*, 242.

<sup>258</sup>Mark Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 33.

Diem took his advice and upon arriving thin the U.S., he began meeting with influential Catholics. In the office of Connecticut Democratic Senator William Benton, Diem met Peter White, a prolific writer that was connected in both Democratic and Republican circles. It was through White that Diem began to get to the next level of influential Americans.<sup>259</sup> During this time he was able to gain access to and support from, a number of influential Catholic Americans, most notably General William Donovan, the Director of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) during World War II, Supreme Court Justice William Douglas, Senator Mike Mansfield, and Senator John F. Kennedy who was beginning his meteoric rise in American politics that would lead to him being elected the first Catholic President.<sup>260</sup> The plum introduction to Spellman however, came from his brother Bishop Thuc, who had studied in Rome with Spellman in the 1930s. Spellman had developed a personal interest in Vietnam that drove him to travel to Saigon in 1948, to protest against the Viet Minh and their massacre of Catholic priests. Spellman and Diem became friends and Spellman offered him lodging at seminaries that were under his purview during the years Diem was in the U.S. Spellman also advocated for him by spreading Diem's message of nationalism and Vietnamese unity under Diem's leadership to stop communism. After his time in the U.S., Diem and Thuc travelled to Europe and were eventually able to obtain an audience with Pope Pius XII.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>259</sup>Joseph G. Morgan, *The Vietnam Lobby The American Friends of Vietnam, 1955-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 6.

<sup>260</sup>FitzGerald, *Fire in the Lake*, 83.

<sup>261</sup>Jacobs, *America's Miracle Man in Vietnam*, 27, 32.

Diem's visit and the political support he received from prominent Catholics and politicians matched the perception of the State Department in Asia, who recognized the potential for assistance by the Catholic community in Vietnam. The department thought that the Catholics in Vietnam were ambiguous in their position regarding communism and wanted to gain some political momentum by energizing the Catholic community as a whole, to recognize the communist danger in Vietnam. Also, before Diem even came to the U.S., the State Department in Vietnam considered his family to be the leaders of the Vietnamese Catholics.<sup>262</sup> Perhaps that view was weighted more towards his brother the Bishop, but nonetheless, there was a desire by U.S. government officials in Vietnam to use Catholicism for philosophical support of the war and the Catholic population as a political base. Keeping that in mind, after Diem and his brother met James Webb, the acting Secretary of State, Webb came away more impressed with Thuc than Diem. Webb felt that through Thuc's Catholic position he was an important figure for America in Indochina. Dallas Coors, the Director of Indochinese Affairs, underscored this by his belief that Catholic leadership in the Vietnamese government was the only way to prevent communist influences.<sup>263</sup>

For Dulles however, this collaboration with the Catholic Church was about more than simply a mutual belief regarding communism. In addition to the pragmatism of aligning the U.S. efforts with the Church, he had personal connections that facilitated his willingness to collaborate with the Catholic Church foreign policy decisions regarding

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<sup>262</sup>Morgan, *The Vietnam Lobby The American Friends of Vietnam, 1955-1975*, 3.

<sup>263</sup>Jacobs, *America's Miracle Man in Vietnam*, 25-27, 31.

South Vietnam.<sup>264</sup> First, John Foster Dulles's son Avery was a Catholic priest who was ordained by Cardinal Spellman.<sup>265</sup> Avery was a Jesuit in Spellman's diocese who would uniquely become a Cardinal without ever being a Bishop; during his career, he was a prolific author and leading theologian. Avery accompanied his father to Rome for an extensive three day audience with Pope Pius XII and it is speculated that Avery personally appealed to his father on behalf of the Catholic Church.<sup>266</sup>

Another personal connection between the Catholic Church and Eisenhower was through John Foster Dulles's brother Allen Dulles, who took over as head of the CIA in February 1953. One of the reasons Allen Dulles was appointed to the post was that Eisenhower trusted him, because previously he had been the intermediary between President Truman and Eisenhower. At the time Eisenhower and Truman had a strained relationship and Eisenhower used Dulles as a backchannel to provide input to the crafting of NSC-68, which would eventually form the foreign policy that Eisenhower would inherit after winning the 1952 presidential election.<sup>267</sup> Under Allen Dulles, the CIA used Spellman multiple times as an unofficial representative of the U.S. government in Latin America. In one instance, Spellman assisted the CIA in overthrowing the Arbenz

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<sup>264</sup>Cooney, *The American Pope*, 232-233.

<sup>265</sup>New York Times, "Dulles and Wife See Son Ordained as Jesuit Priest-Dulles Sees Son Ordained Priest," <http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9807E6DD1238E73ABC4F52DFB066838D649EDE&n=Top%2fReference%2fTimes%20Topics%2fPeople%2fD%2fDulles%2c%20Avery> (accessed April 13, 2013).

<sup>266</sup>Lucien Gregoire, *Murder in the Vatican* (Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse, 2010), 72.

<sup>267</sup>James Srodes, *Allen Dulles: Master of Spies* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 1999), 431-432.



government in Guatemala. The coup came in June 1954 and Spellman was credited in part for his actions in mobilizing the local clergy to support rebel leader Castillo Armas.<sup>268</sup> The CIA and Allen Dulles's effective use of Spellman as a surrogate for U.S. policy would have provided an additional personal connection between the Catholic Church and John Foster Dulles.

Another personal connection between Allen Dulles and the Eisenhower Administration was Dulles's relationship with General William Donovan, the Chief of the U.S. OSS, which was the predecessor of the CIA.<sup>269</sup> Donovan and the Dulles brothers had a long history of friendship when growing up. They had similar early backgrounds and similar professional ones as well. In late 1941, Donovan offered Allen Dulles a position as the Coordinator of Intelligence for the Office of Coordinator of Information, which eventually became the OSS.<sup>270</sup> Through years of working together, Donovan developed into a professional mentor for Allen Dulles who, after Donovan's death, called him, "one of the great men of our time."<sup>271</sup>

Donovan grew up in a strongly Irish Catholic household and went to Niagara University in the hopes of becoming a Dominican priest, but as his brother describes it, he was discouraged by a mentor there and later transferred to Columbia University to

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<sup>268</sup>Cooney, *The American Pope*, 230-236.

<sup>269</sup>Central Intelligence Agency, <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/oss/index.htm> (accessed April 14, 2013).

<sup>270</sup>Burton Hersh, *The Old Boys: The American Elite and the Origins of the CIA* (New York: Scribner's, 1992), 89-90.

<sup>271</sup>Corey Ford, *Donovan of OSS* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), 332.

study law.<sup>272</sup> Disappointment aside, Donovan maintained his strong Catholic ties and as the head of the OSS, Donovan assisted the head of Pro Deo, a Catholic intelligence service, flee Europe to the U.S. While the official was in the U.S., Donovan continued helping and assisted him to return to the Vatican.<sup>273</sup> Pope Pius XII rewarded his support to the Catholic Church personally in July 1944, when he awarded Donovan the Grand Cross of the Order of St. Sylvester in a private ceremony at the Vatican. Awarded to only about 100 men at the time, the honor was bestowed upon Donovan for his assistance to the Catholic hierarchy during World War II.<sup>274</sup> The Order of St. Sylvester is the fourth highest ranking of the orders of papal knighthood.<sup>275</sup>

Not only was Donovan connected in the Catholic Church, but he was connected to Eisenhower personally. One example of Eisenhower's loyalty was during the discussions to end the OSS; Eisenhower opined that due to the success of the OSS under Donovan's leadership, there should be no consideration of disbanding it.<sup>276</sup> Eisenhower maintained his trust in Donovan even after World War II, and in May 1953, he offered Donovan the Ambassadorship to Siam. Even on his deathbed, Eisenhower was connected to Donovan.

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<sup>272</sup>Ibid., 17-19.

<sup>273</sup>Robin W. Winks, *Cloak & Gown: Scholars in the Secret War, 1939-1961* (New York: Morrow, 1987), 353.

<sup>274</sup>Martin A. Lee, "Their Will Be Done," *Mother Jones* (July-August 1983), <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/1983/07/their-will-be-done> (accessed April 14, 2013).

<sup>275</sup>New Advent, "Catholic Encyclopedia: Pontifical Decorations," <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04667a.htm> (accessed April 14, 2013).

<sup>276</sup>Patrick K. O'Donnell, *Operatives, Spies, and Saboteurs: The Unknown Story of the Men and Women of World War II's OSS* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 313.

After Donovan suffered a second stroke in 1958, Eisenhower saw to it personally that Donovan would be transported and treated at Walter Reed Army Hospital.<sup>277</sup> Upon being notified that Donovan had passed away, Eisenhower lamented, “We have lost the last hero.”<sup>278</sup>

Regarding the growing situation in Vietnam, Donovan was an early supporter of Ngo Dinh Diem after being introduced to him in the spring of 1951. He served as the honorary chairman of the American Friends of Vietnam that was a political lobbying group filled in large part with Catholics who supported South Vietnam and specifically, Ngo Dinh Diem, in the struggle against communism. Its membership included many powerful leaders of the time as well as important scholars.<sup>279</sup> This displays another example of how Donovan’s Catholicism manifested itself in his actions. As a mentor to Allen Dulles, these actions would have influenced his representation of Catholic foreign policy causes that overlapped or coincided with U.S. interests. Working together as the head of the CIA and the Secretary of State, the Dulles’s brothers undoubtedly communicated frequently on policy topics. This mix of professional and family relationship with Allen would have given John Foster Dulles a second personal connection to the Catholic cause. All of these connections between the Dulles’, Donovan, Eisenhower, and the Church facilitated turning mutual views of communism between the

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<sup>277</sup>Ford, *Donovan of OSS*, 328, 332.

<sup>278</sup>O’Donnell, *Operatives, Spies, and Saboteurs*, 314.

<sup>279</sup>For a more detailed account on the American Friends of Vietnam see: Joseph G. Morgan, *The Vietnam Lobby The American Friends of Vietnam, 1955-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 6, 37, 31.

Vatican and the Eisenhower Administration, into what would become a “professional” relationship in the context of policy towards South Vietnam.

The same could be said for the personal connection of Eisenhower to Catholicism. The Catholic vote provided him the swing votes he needed in 1952 which paved the way for him to become the first Republican president since Herbert Hoover. This was attributed to a decline in Catholic democratic support from all of the country’s major population centers except Philadelphia.<sup>280</sup> Eisenhower continued to receive support of the Catholic voting bloc and in fact, the Catholic voters increased their support from 44 to 49 percent between 1952 and 1956 in the presidential elections.<sup>281</sup> Therefore it is clear that Eisenhower was politically in touch with the wishes of the Catholic community which in turn provided a personal connection to the Catholic Church’s policies.

In the larger sense, all of these factors discussed combined together and culminated with Diem winning over “elite” members of the Eisenhower Administration.<sup>282</sup> This was a direct result of a desire to leverage Catholic anti-communist philosophy in Vietnam and the political influence Diem gained as a result of Spellman’s advocacy and Pope Pius XII’s support in determining Vatican policy. Spellman’s prominent role in executing Vatican policy by supporting Diem both directly and by proxy, with other powerful Catholics such as Senator Mansfield, General William Donovan, Justice William Douglas, and Senator John F. Kennedy, were instrumental to

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<sup>280</sup>The Catholic Vote in 1952 and 1956.

<sup>281</sup>Gallup.Com, “Election Polls--Vote by Groups, 1952-1956 Gallup Historical Trends,” <http://www.gallup.com/poll/9451/election-polls-vote-groups-19521956.aspx> (accessed April 15, 2013).

<sup>282</sup>Jacobs, *America’s Miracle Man in Vietnam*, 25.

Diem in terms of political support.<sup>283</sup> These efforts led to U.S. pressure on Emperor Bao Dai to appoint Diem as Premier.<sup>284</sup> In the overall commitment to Vietnam, Catholic pressure may not have served a central role, but it did serve an important one that contributed to the Eisenhower Administration's commitment.

The intersections between the Catholic Church and the Eisenhower Administration that led to Catholic pressure to become directly involved in Vietnam came in two components. The first was the complimentary aspects of anti-communist positions that regarded communism as an atheist enterprise. This mentality was growing in popularity in the U.S. and mobilized the country's ideological views providing pressure to the administration. The second was political, which provided the mechanism for the Catholic Church to garner support within the administration. Cardinal Spellman provided powerful direct and indirect political support to the Diem Administration and pressure on the Eisenhower Administration. These actions were in accordance with Vatican policy of stopping the communist spread in Vietnam as spoken by Pope Pius XII.

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<sup>283</sup>Herring, *America's Longest War*, 49.

<sup>284</sup>Kauffman, "Politics, Programs, and Protests," 227.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

The Vietnam War is arguably the most controversial war in American history. Most Americans tend to associate the beginning of the war with the legacy of President John F. Kennedy because of his order to increase American commitment by sending more advisors to the country. The war's roots, however, can be traced to the final days of World War II and the Truman Administration. Because of the perception that Kennedy was responsible for starting what would ultimately become the Vietnam War, there exists an incomplete body of knowledge regarding what influences led to the escalation of the U.S.'s involvement. One of the important but little known influences on the U.S. policy toward Vietnam was the Catholic Church. During the Eisenhower Administration the Catholic Church was influential in the decision to directly intervene in Vietnam.

To gain a full understanding of the context in which the decisions regarding Vietnam were made, it is important to understand the historical background of the country, and why the U.S.'s initial financial interest in the region would ultimately escalate into such a bloody war. Dating back to its earliest history Vietnam was a country under siege by external groups trying to gain power. Every attempt to conquer the Vietnamese people failed but succeeded in establishing an ingrained deeply rooted hatred of outsiders. The French who took advantage of internal turmoil and invaded and established Vietnam as part of the French Indochina Colony ignored this history. The French's objective was hidden behind religious purposes but was in fact purely commercial. The history of the Vietnamese reaction to outside forces and the French chapter of that history was a prelude to America's involvement. The history explains

what led up to the U.S. involvement in the first place and why the U.S. was required to abandon the use of France as a proxy force. Even though over time U.S. reasoning would change, the initial reasons to indirectly intervene centered on post World War II rebuilding to shape the geopolitical landscape and prevent the spread of communism. The French were unable to achieve military success and thus could not create an economic climate whereby Vietnam could enter the global capitalist markets.

The inability to include Vietnam as a trading partner in the region frustrated American efforts to prevent the spread of communism. Post war economic rebuilding policies were the foundation of attempts to stop communism and became driving factors in the development and evolution of America's foreign policy under the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations. Under these conditions, American involvement in Vietnam fully entered the political realm and provided an opportunity for the Catholic Church to influence the U.S. political leadership in their decisions. This regional containment policy was initially based on economic policy to counter the spread of communism and focused on rebuilding the Japanese economy. However, as communist aggression increased globally, the Truman Administration prioritized the use of military means to deter communist expansion. When Eisenhower entered office, he took a different course and pivoted the containment strategy into the New Look policy, which shifted policy back to the views of U.S. State Department official George Kennan. Although the strategic end of stopping communist expansion was the same as Truman's, Eisenhower's New Look policy sought to incorporate the Kennan idea of using all instruments of national power, especially economics, to facilitate capitalist growth in developing countries which, in turn, would contain the communists. Eisenhower faced domestic budget concerns and

believed the focus on economics for communist containment would be a more sustainable and a better long-term approach than matching them militarily. Supporting Eisenhower's theory was the rhetoric of massive retaliation which was, that if provoked, the U.S. would use its arsenal to counter attack at the time and place of its choosing and not necessarily where a conflict was initiated. At the time, no other country had nuclear parity with the U.S. and Eisenhower's position regarding the use of nuclear weapons was no idle threat. The administration's intentions were to keep China from interfering in the region and to prevent a stalemate similar to what was experienced at the end of the Korean War. To prevent China and by proxy, the Soviet Union from interfering in Vietnam, required actions of the government of South Vietnam and the U.S. to be somewhat synchronized.

To achieve this policy synchronization the U.S. and the Diem Administration of South Vietnam developed economic reform initiatives, most notably regarding land distribution called Ordinance 57. Communism and capitalism were considered at the time to be incompatible, so these complimentary economic policies were fundamental to the strategy of stopping communism. The unified policy goal would provide Diem internal stability and the U.S. regional stability by facilitating trade between Vietnam and Japan to build both Asian countries economies. The Catholic Church influenced the implementation of the policy directly by assisting in the planning of the massive Catholic emigration from North to South Vietnam and within that, by individual parish clergymen personally leading their congregations in the move. Some 600,000 Catholic refugees were resettled in areas that served as economic hubs to support land development and transportation of goods for export. For its part, the U.S. heavily subsidized the economic development, provided high level advisors to assist the Diem Administration in creating



the land reform program, and assisted in the propaganda aimed at convincing North Vietnamese Catholics to come south, while also assisting with their transportation.

This unified economic effort was the basis of the overall strategy that the two countries used to counter communist expansion. In the effort to counter communist expansion, there were three key ways that Catholicism and the Catholic Church influenced the decisions and actions of the Diem Administration. The first way was through the Ngo family members' Catholic roots and their deeply ingrained personal religious commitment. These religious convictions steered their actions abroad that resulted in Catholic political support, before and after the Geneva Accords of 1954. Also, after Geneva, when the Diem Administration came into power in South Vietnam, his religious views moved Ngo Dinh Nhu to adopt the Catholic philosophy of Personalism as the official political philosophy of the administration. The second point of influence was the way the Church encouraged Catholics in North Vietnam to emigrate south and placed them in communities that supported the Diem Administration's economic and security initiatives. From Diem's brother Bishop Ngo Dinh Thuc's assistance coordinating and planning the effort with the influential clergy in North Vietnam, to the North Vietnamese parish priests' leadership of their individual congregations, the Catholic clergy were involved. Finally, a shared hatred of communism fueled the Diem Administration and provided additional influence from the Catholic Church. The Church and the Ngo family both saw communism as a godless construct that sought to suppress peoples' individualism which they believed was inherently antagonistic to Catholicism. With communist sentiment rising in traditionally Catholic countries and threatening the Church, Pope Pius XII used his position to influence the fight against communist

expansion and even decreed that Catholics associated or facilitating communism would be excommunicated.

These three points highlight the Diem Administration's reliance on Catholicism for spiritual and policy guidance and the Church's willingness to counter communist expansion. However, the Catholic leaders understood that direct involvement in Vietnam could only serve a limited purpose. Because of this, they knew that political support was required to force a long-term commitment against communism on the Church's behalf. The Vatican needed a proxy agent and the U.S. was the only country whose views of communism aligned with the Church's and who had the economic and military wherewithal to take action. Therefore, the leaders of the Catholic Church carefully influenced the Eisenhower Administration decision to directly intervene in Vietnam.

Prior to the Geneva Accords, the U.S. supported the effort in Vietnam indirectly through financial and material support to the French. However, after the fall of Dien Bien Phu, the Eisenhower Administration was confronted with the decision of how they would manage the effort to prevent communist spread without the French. This decision process is where the Catholic Church applied the most pressure for direct U.S. involvement and there are two key points to consider in making this determination. The first point, similar to the Diem Administration, was the mutual view within the Eisenhower Administration of communism and the determination to prevent its spread. This was the primary guide for U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and President Eisenhower, as they considered foreign policy decisions regarding Vietnam. Because of this shared policy view of communism and the religious views of key members of the Eisenhower Administration, there was an opportunity for the Church to apply political pressure.

Recognizing this, Pope Pius XII personally urged the most powerful Catholic clergyman in the U.S., New York Archbishop Cardinal Francis Spellman (who had already been lobbying for Diem), to encourage further American commitment in Vietnam. The Church mobilized Cardinal Spellman and through his influence on prominent leaders, he was able to bring the Vatican's goals into the American foreign policy discussion regarding Vietnam. Underscoring Spellman's individual power and influence was the increasing strength of the Catholic vote and the renewed popularity of religion in general in the U.S. In sum, there was a powerful combination of openness to religious dialogue in the context of anti-communism by the Eisenhower Administration, political influence of Cardinal Spellman acting directly on Pope Pius XII's orders, and a groundswell in America of renewed spiritualism. This combination supported by the increasing power of the Catholic vote created a pro-Catholic political environment that could not be ignored by the Eisenhower Administration when considering anti-communist policy.

All of these factors together make it clear that the American and Vietnamese Catholic Churches, the Vatican, and Catholicism in general greatly influenced the Eisenhower Administration. The history of Vietnam itself reveals that there would be little use in any country attempting to get too involved in Vietnamese internal workings, particularly in light of the French defeat. The best a foreign country could hope to achieve would be a close collaborative relationship with any ruling party in Vietnam. The Eisenhower Administration had a strong desire to rebuild Japan as a capitalist regional counter balance to China and the Soviet Union. This effort nested with the foreign policy centered on the use of economic power as tool to mold the global political landscape. Because the Eisenhower Administration did not consider the history of Vietnam they did

not understand the context within which the containment policy would be applied. This lack of historical understanding, combined with its foreign policy, focused the Eisenhower Administration single-mindedly on developing complementary economic policies with South Vietnam. Economic policy was the basis for the formation of the anti-communist strategy and created a beneficial environment for the Catholic Church to advocate for its goals. The Ngo family's Catholicism and the efforts of the Vietnamese Catholic Church were directly influential to the process of attaining these Church goals. While in the U.S., the goals of the American Catholic Church and the Pope himself assisted by applying political pressure for intervention in Vietnam. All of these parts compounded and resulted in pressure the Eisenhower Administration could not ignore, and ultimately directly contributed to the decision to directly intervene in Vietnam.

The degree that Catholicism and the Catholic Church influenced the Eisenhower Administration in its decision to directly intervene in Vietnam is an original contribution to the body of knowledge and is important for three reasons. The first is the research highlights the role that religion and religious pressure can play in international relations. Although Catholic pressure was not exclusively causal in the decision making of the Eisenhower Administration, it was undeniably an important factor. This is important to understand because religious pressure could provide an additional non-tangible element into foreign policy creation and implementation that could be unrelated to the country's desired ends. A country's foreign policy should reflect its interests and third party influence could dilute or divert the focus during policy creation or implementation. This became very apparent in the decision by the U.S. to pressure Emperor Bao Dai to select Diem as Premier of South Vietnam after the 1954 Geneva Conference, which lead to

Diem's eventual leadership of South Vietnam. Possibly out of a lack of understanding of Buddhism, the most popular religion of South Vietnam at the time, or unwillingness to compromise with the very powerful Ho Chi Minh, the U.S. purposefully selected Diem because of his Catholicism and the Catholic support he received in the U.S. and European political circles. The Diem Administration turned out to be a brutal and autocratic regime that did not represent the values of America as outlined by the U.S. Bill of Rights. This further complicated the implementation of U.S. foreign policy in the region and was eventually viewed as a betrayal to the American people by their elected leaders.

Understanding that hindsight is perfect, perhaps were it not for some loss of objectivity because of the Catholic influence, the Eisenhower Administration might have followed a different decision path, in whom they supported as a proxy in South Vietnam.

There is a lot to be said for the messaging from the Catholic Church and from the Eisenhower Administration regarding communism. Their messages were in the context of "good versus evil." Through Dulles for the U.S., and Spellman for both the Vatican and American Catholic Church, these messages were loudly proclaimed to the citizens of America. This point resonated in America but prevented a clear understanding of what the U.S. goals in the region were, which was to use economic power to stop the spread of communism. The message focused on the religious components of the anti-communist policy and not the economic components. Because of this, the American voting block was conflicted regarding the commitment that would ultimately prove to be a costly war. The similarities between the Church and the administration's messaging shifted the anti-communist policy to an emotional appeal based on religious principles, instead of a pragmatic explanation of a policy benefit. This placed the cart before the horse in that the

economic policy was portrayed as secondary to anti-communism but in reality; the economics was the foundational policy that anti-communism could build upon. The understanding at the time was that communism could only be contained by military deterrence, military victory, or economic prosperity. Truman chose to focus on the military component, yet Eisenhower committed himself to a balanced approach, whereby economic development was supported by military deterrence. This was because of internal budget concerns and because Eisenhower understood Japanese economic recovery was vital in the region to stop the communist expansion. Again, perhaps if this problem would have been portrayed in the practical manner of economic benefit for the U.S., South Vietnam, and Japan with anti-communism as a desired second order effect, the administration's decision cycle might have been altered.

The second reason the research is significant is because it highlights the importance of understanding the historical context of a foreign policy issue when applied to a specific country. This lack of understanding by the Eisenhower Administration made it easier to be influenced by the Catholic Church because the administration did not have (or chose to ignore) additional information when considering policy options. Essentially, they attempted to apply the containment policy in a vacuum of cultural understanding. The Vietnamese viewed all outsiders with scorn due to their history of invasions and bloody occupations. One must ask if the decision to directly support South Vietnam was informed by an understanding of this history, particularly the recent French history. Why would the Eisenhower Administration think it could do something that no country had been able to do? Although the Chinese were able to occupy Vietnam for long periods of time, the two countries shared a border and were somewhat culturally aligned as Asians.

The French and later the American's were separated by thousands of miles from Vietnam, shared no culture with the Vietnamese (other than the small minority of Catholics) and did not understand the desires of the people. If an impartial holistic view of the situation were considered, the Eisenhower Administration might have dealt with the problem in a different manner. During the Eisenhower Administration the U.S. took varying approaches globally to counter communist expansion, such as supporting the opposition and overthrow of the Arbenz government in Guatemala. A focus of the history of Vietnam would have clearly presented the situation as a more difficult problem than originally thought. Also, clearly understanding Ho Chi Minh's personal history could have provided different options for the U.S. and South Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh had previously been a supporter of the U.S. and historically had not been a staunch communist until threatened by the Chinese after the Maoist revolution. Had the Eisenhower Administration understood the history and not framed the problem in terms of good versus evil, by assuming a monolithic view of Ho Chi Minh as a communist, then a compromise might have been reached that could have prevented the escalation into war.

The third reason the research is important is that in a direct and practical manner, it underscores the importance of the leadership of local religious leaders. During the mass Catholic migration from North to South Vietnam, the local Catholic Clergy was instrumental in "shepherding their flock." At the highest levels, religious leadership were influencing the relocation decisions of these Catholic communities to support the Diem Administration. This could serve as an example of the power of the position that a religious leader holds. This becomes important particularly regarding the recent American Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the focus on support and stability operations, which

require a population centric focus. One of the ties between the Eisenhower Administration and the Catholic Church was the messages about communism, which were routinely in a biblical context. This should be clearly understood by those working with a foreign culture and used to inform the manner that a religious leader should be engaged at the lower levels to support military objectives. In other words, sometimes communicating in a right versus wrong manner instead of a practical manner might garner more support for an effort. This worked initially for the Eisenhower Administration through Dulles's rhetoric and for the Church through Spellman's rhetoric.

Although it is established that the Catholic Church influenced the Eisenhower Administration, two questions were raised during the course of the research that are outside the scope of this project. The first is whether the Catholic Church continued to be influential in subsequent administrations. America views the Vietnam War as Kennedy's war but Kennedy went out of his way to not appear controlled or influenced by the Catholic Church. Did the Church attempt to influence the Kennedy and later Johnson Administrations regarding the Vietnam War and if so did their position shift away from escalation? Additionally, President Nixon, who was Eisenhower's Vice President and one of his war hawks, took a page from Eisenhower's Korean War playbook and campaigned on a platform of ending the war in Vietnam and paving the way for communist takeover. How did that fit with the views of the Catholic Church?

The second question raised outside of the scope of this research is what other historical examples are there of the influence of religion and religious leaders on foreign policy. In light of modern day frustrations with Iran and their assumed attempts at developing a nuclear weapons program, could the U.S. leverage religious leaders to



negotiate or mediate with the Iranian theocratic leaders to reach a peaceful settlement? Does America's seemingly stringent adherence to secularism regarding government function preclude this and if so, at what cost?<sup>285</sup>

The Catholic Church influenced the Eisenhower Administration's decision to directly intervene in South Vietnam to prevent the spread of communism. Understanding the history of the country and how overall U.S. foreign policy goals applied to Vietnam created the requirement for intervention and opened the door for Catholic Church influence. That intervention had to be based off of mutual economic policies because that was the fundamental method to counter communist spread. Within those policies, the Church was instrumental directly in South Vietnam and indirectly through political pressure in the U.S. The actions in South Vietnam combined with the political pressure in the U.S. provided influence on the Eisenhower Administration.

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<sup>285</sup>For more regarding faith based diplomacy see: Matthew A. DeLoia, "New Tactic for Engagement with Iran: Faith-Based Diplomacy" (Master's thesis, US Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, June 2011).

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