Making the "National Revolution": The ascent of Ngô Đình Diệm, 1945-1955

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I. Introduction

In life and in death, Ngô Đình Diệm has been a magnet for controversy. In the voluminous literature on the Vietnam War, the man who ruled South Vietnam from 1954 until his assassination in 1963 has been both adored and excoriated. But if Diệm has not suffered from a lack of attention, the various representations of him and his career nonetheless leave something to be desired. In the 1960s, the journalist Bernard Fall noted that nearly everything which had been written about Diệm up to that point consisted "either of totally uncritical eulogy or of equally partisan condemnation."[1] Remarkably, Fall's statement is still true today. There is no scholarly biography of Diệm in English, Vietnamese or French. There are, of course, many good histories of the Vietnam War, including several which have been relatively restrained in their treatments of Diệm. But even those historians who have refrained from both praise and condemnation have typically portrayed Diệm in rather flat and simplistic terms. Either Diệm is represented as a spirited Vietnamese anti-communist who was undone by his fickle American allies; or he is an adherent of a hopeless mandarin authoritarianism; or he is a paranoid power-monger who ultimately cared only about preserving his rule and promoting his family's status. These are caricatures, and while each of them contains certain truths, none of them contributes much to a more nuanced understanding of Diệm and the ideas that motivated him. As one historian recently pointed out, Diệm continues to be represented as a "cardboard cut-out", a man devoid of any serious intellectual commitments.[2] The endurance of these caricatures is a problem, because Diệm is an important figure not only in the history of the Vietnam War but also in the history of modern Vietnam.

This paper focuses on an especially understudied part of Diệm's career: the decade prior to his appointment as premier of South Vietnam in 1954. Most of the

existing accounts of Diệm's life note that he refused several offers of political office during this period, and infer from this that he was politically inactive.[3] These accounts are echoes of the official version of Diệm's life story which circulated in South Vietnam in the years after 1954; by that point, it was politically expedient for Diệm to suggest that he had remained aloof from the bloodletting of the Franco-Việt Minh war. But a close examination of the historical evidence from this period reveals a rather different story. Instead of watching from the sidelines as Vietnamese and foreign groups jostled for power in Indochina during 1945-1954, Diệm sought to turn these contests to his own advantage. In fact, he maintained contacts and intrigued at one time or another with almost all of the key players in Indochina during these years: the Japanese, the French, the emperor Bảo Đại, the Americans and even the Việt Minh. It is true that Diệm was contemplative, introspective and reserved, and that he had a penchant for taking frequent meditative retreats. But it is also true that he was possessed of a deep resolve to become the leader of an independent Vietnam, and he worked doggedly to realize that goal.

Yet, if Diệm's activities during 1945-1954 reflect his ambition for power, they also reveal something about his convictions and his ideas. On those occasions when Diệm opted to decline offers of political office, he was not rejecting politics altogether. Rather, he was insisting on having the latitude to implement the policies and strategies which he believed were necessary to realize his vision for a modern and independent Vietnam. This vision—which Diệm and his supporters eventually dubbed the "National Revolution"—emerged only gradually, and it continued to evolve after he took power in South Vietnam in 1954. Nonetheless, its broad outlines were already coming into focus before that date. Understanding this vision and the intellectual influences that shaped it is thus a key step towards a more historical and less caricatured interpretation of Diệm and the regime he created. Just as the history of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam after 1945 was shaped by both the politics and ideas of its founder Hồ Chí Minh, so too was the history of South Vietnam after 1954 profoundly affected by the politics and ideas of Ngô Đình Diệm.

II. Catholic, Confucian, Nationalist: The strange career of Ngô Đình Diệm, 1901-1945

Any examination of Diem's career and ideas must begin by assessing the two key influences which shaped his spiritual and intellectual life: Catholicism and Confucianism. Diệm was born in the Nguyễn imperial capital of Huế in 1901 to a father who was both a Catholic and a mandarin. Diệm's two older brothers opted for careers as a mandarin and as a priest, respectively. As a teenager, Diệm gave serious thought to becoming a priest before finally resolving that he would follow his father into the imperial bureaucracy. But having chosen a career as an administrator, he also took a priest-like vow of celibacy, which he apparently kept for the remainder of his life.

Yet, if Diệm was deeply influenced by Catholicism and Confucianism, the effects of these on his views and his actions were not always as simple and as straightforward as some observers have assumed. Many authors have asserted that the main impact of both Catholicism and Confucianism on Diệm was to make him essentially conservative and reactionary, and to incline him towards "traditional" ways of thinking about governance and power. These writers variously describe Diệm as "The Last Confucian," or as a throwback to medieval European Christianity—in short, as a premodern man who preferred to cling to his outdated premodern notions rather than to face modern realities.[4] But in fact, the relationship between Diệm's Catholicism and Confucianism on the one hand and his politics on the other was actually quite complex; moreover, this relationship was shaped much more by contemporary developments and debates than by the dead hand of "tradition" that is alleged to have weighed so heavily on Diệm's mind.

The contemporary qualities of Diệm's Catholicism and Confucianism are revealed in their impact upon his core political conviction: his fervent Vietnamese nationalism. There is no inherent or obvious reason why either Catholicism or Confucianism should have inclined Diệm to become an anti-French nationalist. On the contrary, Diệm hailed from a class of "Catholic mandarins" which had prospered under French patronage during the early colonial period. Diệm's father Ngô Đình Khả was among the most prominent of the Vietnamese Catholics who had collaborated with the French during the late nineteenth century, and he had been rewarded with a high court position.[5] However, the enthusiasm of the "Catholic mandarins" for collaboration turned out to be of relatively short duration, and after the turn of the twentieth century many of

them became increasingly critical of the colonial regime. For example, Khả became disillusioned with the French in 1907 when they deposed the Vietnamese emperor whom Khả had served. The Catholic mandarin who most irritated the French was Nguyễn Hữu Bài (1863-1935), who became Prime Minister in 1916 and was the most powerful Vietnamese at Court during the 1920s. As head of the Council of Ministers, Bài badgered the French to restore some of the administrative powers which they had usurped from the Court. Significantly, both Diệm and his older brother Ngô Đình Khôi were counted as members of Bài's faction.[6]

By 1933, Diệm was so closely associated with Bài that when the French decided in that year to remove Bài from the imperial cabinet, they arranged to have Diệm elevated to the post of Interior Minister as a gesture of consolation to the old mandarin. The move failed to mollify Bài, who first counseled Diệm to call for the same reforms that Bài had demanded earlier, and then advised his young protégé to resign when the reforms were not forthcoming. Diệm followed Bài's advice, and thus gained fame throughout Indochina as a staunch and uncompromising nationalist—even as he also confirmed his status as the new leader of a clique of disgruntled Catholic Confucians.[7]

The alienation of the "Catholic mandarins" paralleled another important development within Vietnamese Catholicism: a push for the "nativization" of Vietnam's Catholic clergy.[8] As Catholic enthusiasm for collaboration waned, there was increased sentiment in favor of replacing the Europeans in the ecclesiastical hierarchy with Vietnamese prelates. This led during the 1930s to the appointments of the first Vietnamese bishops. The importance of these changes within the church to Diệm's subsequent career can scarcely be understated. One of the new bishops was his older brother Ngô Đình Thục, who was also known to be anti-French, and who would be one of his Diệm's most energetic and influential supporters during the coming decades.[9]

By the late 1930s, Diệm had established himself both as a Catholic leader and as an advocate for Vietnamese nationalism. It was not until the early 1940s, however, that international events presented him with favorable conditions for the pursuit of his anti-French objectives. During the Japanese occupation of Indochina (1940-1945), Diệm undertook to mobilize Catholics to support a movement for independence; he also sought to broaden his support among non-Catholic Vietnamese nationalists by invoking his

Confucian credentials. At the same time, Diệm schemed with the Japanese, whom he believed could be instrumental in the downfall of the French colonial regime.

Diệm's activities during World War II were facilitated by the strange liminal position of Indochina in-between the Vichy and Japanese empires. This unusual condition stemmed from Japanese decisions in 1940-41 to allow the French colonial regime to continue to function during the occupation in exchange for basing rights and provisions. However, not all Japanese leaders endorsed this decision; from the outset of the occupation, there were many Japanese leaders (including both civilian officials and military officers) who wanted to oust the French and to establish independence for Indochina within Japan's East Asian Co-prosperity sphere. These "idealists" among the Japanese soon became engaged in a great number of anti-French intrigues involving various Vietnamese parties, factions and sects. Many of these intrigues revolved around the Vietnamese prince Cường Để, who had been living in Japan for decades and who was both an anti-French activist and a pretender to the Nguyễn Throne. The prince had first gone to Japan in 1906 as an ally of Phan Bội Châu, a Confucian scholar who became the leading Vietnamese anticolonial activist of the early twentieth century. Now, nearly four decades later, pro-independence groups in both Tokyo and Indochina plotted to replace the French colonial regime with a Vietnamese government under Cường Để.[10]

Diệm proved to be especially adept at making allies among the Japanese "idealists" who sympathized with the cause of Vietnamese independence.[11] His supporters included Japanese diplomats, intelligence agents, army officers, and even some civilian intellectuals such as the writer and scholar Kiyoshi Komatsu.[12] In 1943, certain of these backers helped arrange for Diệm to be named to the pro-Cường Để "Committee of National Reconstruction" (*Ủy Ban Kiến Quốc*).[13] Also in 1943, Diệm dispatched an emissary to visit Cường Để in Japan[14], and began organizing a new political party in Central Vietnam called "The Association for the Restoration of Dai Viet" (*Đại Việt Phục Hưng Hội*). This party seems to have been overwhelmingly Catholic in its membership and its operations were limited to parts of Central Vietnam.[15] However, the party's name—and especially its invocation of the concept of "restoration" (*phục hưng*)—seems to have been calculated to play down Diệm's Catholic identity in favor of Confucian notions of legitimacy. Similarly, Diệm's alliance with Cường Để was

in part an effort to burnish his Confucian credentials through association with a veteran of earlier anticolonial movements led by members of the scholar-gentry class. In all of these undertakings, Diệm depended heavily on his Japanese supporters, especially after the French Sûreté began to crack down on his party during the summer of 1944. Thanks to the intervention of the Japanese consul in Huế, Diệm managed to escape the French dragnet and was taken in disguise to Saigon, where he lived for several months under the protection of the Japanese military police.[16]

In early 1945, Diệm very nearly succeeded in becoming the head of a new Vietnamese government under Japanese sponsorship. By late 1944, Japanese leaders had resolved to engineer a coup to bring down the French colonial regime in Indochina. The initial version of the Japanese plan was drawn up by pro-independence army officers, and it called for Cường Để to be placed on the Nguyễn throne with the understanding that he would appoint Diệm as premier of an independent and united Vietnam. However, the idealist aspects of the plan were opposed by the new commander of the Japanese garrison army in Indochina, who wanted to establish Japanese military rule in Cochinchina and who therefore would only consent to a limited grant of independence.[17] Thus, when the Japanese coup finally took place on 9 March 1945, the emperor Bảo Đại was allowed to retain his throne and Cường Để remained in Japan.[18] There is evidence which suggests that Diệm might still have managed to become premier under Bảo Đại even after the coup had taken place. Despite Diệm's links to Cường Để, the emperor nonetheless considered Diệm to be the best man for the job and sent two telegrams asking him to come to Huế.[19] After agonizing for a time about how to respond, Diệm opted to decline the emperor's request. He seems to have come to regret his decision almost immediately and he may have tried to reverse it, but it was too late; Bảo Đại had already appointed the historian Trần Trọng Kim as the premier of the new "Empire of Vietnam".[20] Diệm continued his efforts to maneuver for political advantage during the summer of 1945, and he was probably involved in a last-minute attempt to persuade the Japanese to change course and allow Cường Để to come back to Vietnam after all.[21] But the surprise collapse of Japan in August effectively terminated these intrigues, and Diệm was left watching from the sidelines as the August Revolution catapulted Hồ Chí Minh and the Việt Minh into power.[22]

Understanding Diệm's experiences during the Japanese occupation can serve to illuminate his later career in at least two important respects. First, Diệm's behavior with regards to the Japanese reveals something of his strategy for finding foreign allies. Diệm had many supporters among the Japanese, but he did not form these alliances haphazardly or indiscriminately. On the contrary, Diệm was careful to select those groups and individuals among the Japanese who shared certain of his convictions and beliefs. In particular, he deliberately sought out the "idealists" who had genuine sympathy for his anticolonial views. This is an important point, because historians who have written about Diệm's efforts to find foreign allies have tended to give short shrift to his anticolonialism and have typically seen it as less important than other of his convictions, such as his anticommunism. For his Japanese backers, Diệm's reputation as a fierce anticolonialist was the essence of his appeal. Diệm thus discovered that he could form close personal relationships with foreigners based not merely on political expediency, but also on shared commitments to more abstract ideals. As will be shown below, this personal style of alliance building would characterize his subsequent dealings with foreigners—especially his later dealings with Americans.

Second, Diệm's activities during the early 1940s reveal his efforts to combine his Catholic affiliations and his Confucian convictions into an attractive nationalist political formula. Though the rank-and-file of his support remained mostly Catholic, Diệm during these years began to consider how he might align himself with non-Catholic groups and leaders in order to broaden the base of his popular support. In doing so, Diệm emphasized Confucianism and tried to evoke the turn-of-the century era of scholar-gentry resistance to the French. For Diệm, therefore, the alliance with Cường Để was of more than merely sentimental significance. The old prince not only promised to transform the Nguyễn dynasty into a rallying point for resistance against the French, but also served as a living connection to the old Confucian heroes who had led the anticolonial resistance in decades before.

In the end, the events of 1945 were profoundly bittersweet for Diệm. On the one hand, the power and prestige of the French colonial regime had been dealt a devastating blow. The Japanese coup of March 1945, even though it did not produce the results that Diệm had hoped for, nonetheless heralded the decline and eventual demise of the colonial

system which Diệm had come to despise. On the other hand, the August Revolution and the stunning rise of the Việt Minh marked the beginning of a new political era for Vietnam and the emergence of a powerful new rival. After August 1945, it was obvious to everyone that Vietnam had entered an age of revolution in which old political styles and strategies no longer seemed relevant. It was equally obvious that the initiative in Vietnamese politics had been siezed by Hồ Chí Minh. In the years ahead, the success of Diệm's bid to become leader of an independent Vietnam would hinge on his ability to find some way to present himself not only as a capable successor to the French, but also as a realistic—and revolutionary—alternative to Hồ and the Việt Minh.

III. The quest for the "Third Force", 1946-1950

The August Revolution and the changes that it wrought on the Indochinese politcal landscape had an immediate effect on Diệm. His reputation as a principled and determined nationalist remained untainted[23], but it could hardly compare to Hồ's new status as Vietnam's leading national hero. That status, of course, had been powerfully confirmed in Hanoi on 2 September 1945 when Hồ proclaimed Vietnam's independence and announced the formation of a new Vietnamese government, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). The French, meanwhile, were demonstrating their determination to reassert their control over Indochina. As these two rivals prepared to take up arms against each other, Diệm suddenly appeared to be at risk of becoming politically irrelevant.

Contrary to what some have suggested, however, Diệm did not resign himself to withdrawing from the fray as the French and the Việt Minh fought over the future of Indochina. Instead, he undertook to steer a course in-between his two powerful rivals in the hope that he would of eventually be able to eclipse both of them. Like other anticommunist nationalists in Vietnam, Diệm's main goal after 1945 was the establishment of a "Third Force" that would be strong enough to overcome both colonialism and communism. This does not mean, however, that Diệm was unwilling to consider the possibility of making temporary accommodations with either the French or

the Việt Minh. After 1954, Diệm and his supporters tried to suggest that he had practiced a high-minded neutrality during the First Indochina War, and refused to have any dealings with either side. In fact, Diệm's relations with both parties were considerably more complex than he later let on. Especially during the early years of the war, he was careful to leave open the possibility that he might be persuaded to throw in with one side or the other, even as he sought a "middle way" that would allow him to eventually outmaneuver both of these powerful rivals.

The gap between Diệm's subsequent accounts of his activities during these years and his actual behavior is especially apparent when his relations with the Việt Minh are examined. These relations included his dramatic first and only face-to-face encounter with Hồ Chí Minh. Diệm was detained by Việt Minh cadres sometime in late 1945 or early 1946, and imprisoned for a time at a remote mountain site. Then, on the eve of the signature of the Franco-Việt Minh agreement of 6 March 1946, Diệm was brought to meet with Hồ. Fortunately for Diệm, Hồ was in a conciliatory mood. He knew that the pending agreement with the French contained numerous compromises on the question of Vietnamese independence, and he was anxious to shore up public support for the DRV regime. Diệm's reputation as a nationalist and his standing among Catholics made him a potential ally of considerable value, and Hồ therefore offered him a position in the new cabinet that he was organizing. But Diệm turned down the offer. Diệm's decision was undoubtedly influenced by the fact that his oldest brother Ngô Đình Khôi and Khôi's teenage son had been executed by Việt Minh agents in Huế only a few months before. Hồ was disappointed with Diệm's refusal, but he apparently still held out hope that Diệm would change his mind, because he arranged for Diệm to be released.

In the years after this meeting took place, several accounts of it appeared in both the Vietnamese and the Western media. All of these accounts were based solely or primarily on Diệm's recollection of the event. However, his way of telling the story seems to have become more elaborate and dramatic with the passage of time. In the earliest versions of the story which Diệm related during the late 1940s and early 1950s, he reported that he had been willing to consider serving in a DRV government led by Hồ, and that Hồ had balked at giving Diệm the degree of control that he demanded as the price of his cooperation.[24] But after Diệm's accession to power in 1954, the story

changed and Diệm's behavior during the encounter was represented in more intransigent terms. Officially sanctioned biographies published by Diệm's supporters in South Vietnam after 1954 asserted that Diệm had refused to have any truck with Hồ as a matter of principle.[25] This version was essentially the same as the accounts which Diệm told to foreign journalists during the early 1960s. In an interview with Stanley Karnow in 1961, Diệm claimed that he had replied to Hồ's offer with a rebuke:

> You speak a language without conscience. I work for the good of the nation, but I cannot be influenced by pressure. I am a free man. I shall always be a free man. Look me in the face. Am I a man who fears oppression or death?

According to Diệm, Hồ responded to this display of bravado by meekly acknowledging that Diệm was free to go.[26]

Unfortunately, there are apparently no other extant accounts to which Diệm's various versions of the meeting might be compared. Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to conclude that Diệm was probably willing to consider collaborating with the Việt Minh in 1946 if only as a temporary expedient towards the expansion of his own base of public support. The key evidence in this regard is the fact that Diệm's relations with the Việt Minh did not end with his meeting with Hồ; on the contrary, he maintained links to Việt Minh leaders for some years afterwards. Evidence recently unearthed in the French colonial archives shows that Diệm was in contact with Việt Minh commanders in Southern Vietnam by the summer of 1947, if not earlier. (Diệm established these contacts from the Catholic diocese of Vĩnh Long in the Mekong delta, where he lived under the protection of his older brother, the Bishop Ngô Đình Thục.) Diệm seems to have sought out particular Việt Minh leaders and to have proffered the possibility of collaboration in the hopes that he might eventually persuade them to abandon Hồ and to throw in with him. This was consistent with his main objective at this time, which was the creation of a broad-based "National Union Front" that would unite both Catholics and non-Catholic groups in support of Vietnamese independence. In particular, the Front advocated "dominion status" for Vietnam, which Diệm described as analogous to the position of Pakistan and India within the British Commonwealth. Intelligence collected by the French suggests that Diệm's proposals generated considerable interest within Việt Minh ranks in the south and no small amount of anxiety for Communist leaders during

1947 and 1948. Many Việt Minh officials expressed admiration for Diệm and Thục, and there were even whispers that Diệm might secure the defection of Nguyễn Bình, the top Việt Minh military commander in the South.[27]

At the same time that Diệm was flirting with Việt Minh officials, he was also engaged in a *pas de deux* with the French colonial regime. Diệm was more determined than ever that the French must leave Indochina. But just as he deemed it expedient to maintain contacts with the Việt Minh as a means to eventually undermining the appeal of Communism, so he discerned that it might be useful to refrain from overt opposition to the colonial government. In particular, Diệm hoped that he might be able to exploit the imminent implementation of the so-called "Bao Dai solution" and turn it to his own political advantage. There was little love lost between Diệm and Bảo Đại, who could hardly forget Diệm's earlier refusals to serve in the imperial government. But both men seemed to have sensed that their political destinies were linked together, and each still remained open to the possibility that they might work together for mutual advantage.

Following his abdication during the August Revolution in 1945, Bảo Đại had served briefly as a "political advisor" to the Việt Minh. He soon became uncomfortable with this arrangement and he opted in 1946 to go into exile abroad; but by establishing himself in temporary residence in Hong Kong, he tacitly indicated his willingness to consider a return to the political stage in Indochina. French officials, meanwhile, had decided that the former emperor might yet be of some political utility to their efforts to reassert their influence in Indochina. Even before the outbreak of hostilities between French Union and Việt Minh forces in late 1946, the French were considering how they might establish an ostensibly independent Vietnamese government that could draw nationalist support away from Hồ's DRV government. The "Bảo Đại solution" to this problem proposed to establish the former emperor as a "mediator" between the interests of French colonialism on the one hand and the nationalist convictions of the Vietnamese public opinion on the other. Though initially wary of the French proposal, Bảo Đại was leaning towards accepting it by the end of 1947. In December of that year, he briefly traveled to Indochina to meet with French officials and to sign a protocol outlining a procedure for the establishment of a Vietnamese government within the French Union.

He then repaired to Hong Kong to consider his next move and to hear the views of prominent Vietnamese officials and leaders.[28]

Diệm, who had traveled to Hong Kong earlier in 1947 to meet with the ex-emperor, was among those now called back to offer his advice. Diệm counseled Bảo Đại to hold out for more concessions, and warned him that nothing less than a grant of dominion status would satisfy Vietnamese nationalists. Bảo Đại was unpersuaded, however, and Diệm began to cast about for other means to press the ex-emperor to give more attention to his concerns.[29] In February 1948, Diệm and other nationalist leaders met in Saigon to define a framework for negotiations with the French on the matter of Vietnamese independence. The proposal called for a Vietnamese assembly to appoint a representative (Bảo Đại) who would be empowered to negotiate with the French but would also be obliged to consult with the assembly. Diệm subsequently went back to Hong Kong twice more to try to persuade Bảo Đại to support this scheme; he also lobbied the French for additional concessions on the independence issue.[30] By mid-1948, however, it was clear that the key elements of the "Bảo Đại solution" had already been fixed along the lines that the French had specified. In June 1948, Bảo Đại signed a second agreement with the French which purported to grant Vietnam its independence as an "associated state" within the French Union. The specific nature of the "independence" conferred by France was not revealed until the following year, when Bảo Đại and French President Vincent Auriol met at the Elysée Palace in Paris to define the administrative details of the new Franco-Vietnamese relationship. The Elysée Accords of 8 March 1949 established limited autonomy for Vietnam in certain areas of administration, but allowed France to retain overall control of diplomatic, economic and military policy. A short time later, Bảo Đại returned to Vietnam and declared himself to be Chief of State of the new "State of Vietnam" (SVN).

Even though he had disregarded Diệm's advice to hold out for more concessions from the French, Bảo Đại still hoped that Diệm would consent to serve in the new SVN government. Diệm, however, was disgusted with what he viewed as the ex-emperor's capitulation to French demands, and he decided that the time had come for him to take a more definite public stand in favor of a "Third Force" alternative for Vietnamese nationalism. On 16 June 1949, Diệm published a statement which amounted to a

manifesto for the new political movement that he hoped to raise. The statement intimated that the gap between him and Bảo Đại was widening; specifically, Diệm dismissed recent reports of his impending appointment to the premiership as the idle fantasies of "minds rich in imagination." The statement also underscored Diệm's dissatisfaction with the Elysée Accords by repeating his demand that France grant Vietnam the same form of independence enjoyed by India and Pakistan. At the same time, Diệm made clear that he had no intention of collaborating with the Việt Minh. On the contrary, his statement included an unambiguous signal of his intent to draw support away from Hồ and communism. Diệm declared that leadership positions in the new Vietnam should belong to "those elements who have rendered meritorious service to the Fatherland" and especially to "resistance fighters"—an indication that Diệm would embrace Việt Minh leaders who were willing to defect to his cause.[31]

In retrospect Diệm's statement of June 1949 marked not only an important shift in his political strategy but also a turning point in his career as a Vietnamese nationalist leader. In seeking to distinguish himself from the French and the Việt Minh, Diệm offered his compatriots what amounted to an alternative vision for the transformation of Vietnamese life and society. This vision was not merely a call for a return to traditional values and institutions. On the contrary, Diệm made it quite clear that he considered his views to be as or more revolutionary than the proposals offered by his rivals:

> ...it should be known that the present struggle is not only a battle for the political independence of the Fatherland, but also a social revolution [*cách mạng xã hội*] to restore independence to the peasants and workers of Vietnam. In order that each and every person in Vietnam can have sufficient means to live in a matter befitting the dignity of a man who is truly free, I advocate social reforms that are sweeping and bold, with the condition that the dignity of man will always be respected and will be free to flourish.[32]

For the moment, the details of Diệm's vision—including those pertaining to the crucial problems of its realization in policy and practice—remained obscure. Neither did Diệm offer any explanation of the origins of his vision, or indicate what had inspired him to express it. Nonetheless, he had taken an important step towards the elucidation of a program of political action and social transformation that was both forward-looking and distinctive. This Diệmist vision of Vietnam's future, though still protean and vague in 1949, would become steadily more elaborate and detailed in the coming years, and in

various ways it would inform all of Diệm's important decisions and policies until the end of his life.

Diệm no doubt hoped that the publication of his June 16 statement would serve to rally public opinion in favor of the "Third Force" that he hoped to establish. On this point, however, he was to be disappointed. The statement was widely read and noted within Vietnam, but it did not produce a new upsurge of popularity for Diệm or derail the implementation of the "Bảo Đại solution". For three years, Diệm had succeeded in maintaining a precarious neutrality in between the French and the Việt Minh, but he had failed to attract much support away from either side. Meanwhile, the patience of both the French and the Việt Minh for Diệm's intrigues had been wearing thin. Diệm would soon be obliged to pursue new strategies and to go in search of new allies.

IV. Diệm's American exile, 1950-1953

During the fall and winter of 1949-1950, Diệm discovered that his room for political maneuver within Vietnam had been drastically reduced by a combination of international and internal Indochinese developments. The triumph of Mao Zedong and the creation of the People's Republic of China in October 1949 led in short order to official recognition and support for the Việt Minh from both the PRC and the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, the ratification of the Elysée accords by the French National Assembly in January 1950 paved the way for a formal recognition of the "Bảo Đại solution" by the United States and Britain. These international shifts presaged a general hardening of political positions within Indochina. With the DRV now tilting towards the PRC and the USSR, Hồ and his colleagues were less willing to make ideological concessions to secure the cooperation of non-communist nationalists. At the same time, Bảo Đại and the French turned to Washington and its promises of military and economic support as a means to gain the upper hand on the battlefield. For Diệm, the overall effect of these developments was to diminish the leverage which he had previously enjoyed as a "neutral" party in the conflict. This loss of leverage was brought home to Diệm in early 1950 when he learned that the Việt Minh had issued orders for his assassination.[33] For

Diệm, the time had come to consider alternative strategies and to seek support from other quarters. In the summer of 1950, he decided to go into exile overseas.

Diệm probably departed Vietnam without a single strategy or plan. Instead, he seems to have been exploring a number of different ways of garnering support from various foreign groups and governments. Accompanied by Bishop Thục, who was as energetic as ever in support of his younger brother's political goals, Diệm set out first for Japan to renew some old acquaintances and to make some new ones. Diệm's key contact in Japan was Kiyoshi Komatsu, the "idealist" intellectual who had befriended and supported Diệm during World War II. Komatsu arranged for Diệm to have his first (and as it turned out, his only) meeting with his old ally, Prince Cường Để, who was still living in Tokyo. Diệm later recalled his encounter with Cường Để as a pleasant affair,[34] and presumably there was a good deal of reminiscing about what might have been in 1945. But there may also have been talk of a new collaboration between Diệm and the Prince. Prior to their departure from Vietnam, Diệm and Thục had expressed interested in a scheme in which Bảo Đại would be persuaded to abdicate in favor of his young son, the prince Bảo Long. This maneuver would, the brothers hoped, pave the way for Cường Để to return to Indochina as royal regent for the new king.[35] Cường Để might well have been interested in such a plan. In fact, a few weeks prior to his meeting with Diệm, the prince had attempted to travel by ship to Indochina, only to be denied entry by French authorities. As it happened, Cường Để would not get the chance to make another return attempt, even if he had been inclined to make one. The prince died in Tokyo on 6 April 1951, having spent the last 36 years of his life in exile.[36]

In retrospect, the most important event of Diệm's stay in Japan was not his meeting with Cường Để, but his introduction (also arranged by Komatsu) to a young American political scientist named Wesley Fishel. Only 31 years old in 1950, Fishel was already establishing himself as an expert on East Asian politics. Like many political scientists of his generation, Fishel took a top-down approach to his discipline; this approach was reflected in his particular interest in East Asian elites, who were the subjects of much of his research. But if Fishel wanted to study elites, he also aspired to influence, advise and collaborate with them. As one of his colleagues later recalled, Fishel made a habit from early in his career of cultivating personal connections with

Asian leaders whom he deemed likely to acquire power in the future.[37] Despite finding Diệm to be "vague and general" in his remarks, Fishel was nevertheless sufficiently interested to offer to begin a correspondence with him.[38] Fishel subsequently became one of Diệm's most loyal and determined American supporters, and Diệm would make good use of Fishel's government and academic connections during and after the period of his exile. By 1954, Fishel was Diệm's closest American friend and advisor, and he would continue to enjoy that distinction for some years thereafter.

Diệm and Thục must have been heartened that an American like Fishel would show interest in their cause, because the United States was the next stop on their itinerary. Just as Diệm had tried to exploit Japanese idealist sympathies to win Tokyo's support during the early 1940s, so he now hoped to turn American anticolonial sentiments to his advantage. In early September 1950, the brothers crossed the Pacific, transited the US from west to east and arrived in Washington DC where, thanks to advance arrangements made by US diplomats in Saigon and Japan, they were cordially received at the State Department. This afforded them a chance to pitch their plan to equip Catholic militia fighters with American weapons as a step towards the creation of an effective "third force" movement. The US officials who listened to Diệm and Thục were intrigued by the idea of including Catholic forces within a new Vietnamese National Army. However, they were generally unimpressed with Diệm and his potential as a leader. One official present at the meetings declared afterwards that Diệm was "concerned equally if not more... with furthering his own personal ambitions than solving [the] complex problems facing his country today."[39]

Having failed to win any definite promises of US support, Diệm and Thục continued on to Europe in October 1950, where Thục was scheduled to attend a meeting of Vietnamese bishops in Rome. Along the way, Diệm stopped off in Paris and arranged to send a message to Bảo Đại, who was in France for talks with officials there. In his message, Diệm tendered a new offer to serve as prime minister, qualified by the stipulation that he receive a grant of authority sufficient to rein in the power of the regional administrations within Vietnam. This proposal seemed to be a climbdown for Diệm because it did not seem to be predicated on his earlier demand that Vietnam receive dominion status before he would consent to serve in an SVN government. Bảo Đại,

however, was unimpressed by Diệm's new flexibility, and indicated merely that he would consider the offer.[40]

By December 1950, Diệm's political fortunes had reached their nadir. His ventures to Japan, the US and Europe had all failed to produce the immediate political boost that he needed to rally support for a "third force" alternative in Indochina. Should he attempt to return to Vietnam, he faced political isolation and possible assassination. Confronted with such a dismal situation, Diệm decided to head in a new direction, both strategically and geographically. Taking his leave of Thục, who was due to return to Vietnam, Diệm re-crossed the Atlantic back to the US. He would remain there for another two-and-a-half years. During this time, he slowly and steadily expanded his network of American allies and advocates. Along with the opportunities to make contacts and find supporters, Diệm's American exile gave him time to reconsider and refine his political tactics, strategies and goals.

Diệm's ability to make personal connections to influential Americans during his US stay from 1950 to 1953 was remarkable. The list of Americans who met and professed their admiration for Diệm during this period included a Roman Catholic Cardinal, a justice of the US Supreme Court, at least half a dozen sitting members of Congress, numerous journalists and media figures, several important academics, and even William J. Donovan, the founder and former head of the famous Office of Strategic Services (OSS).[41] Many of these Americans were Catholics, which reflected Diệm's reliance on the Vatican connections of Thục and other Vietnamese prelates. Indeed, Diệm depended on his Catholic connections not merely for access and introductions, but also for more basic needs; during much of his American exile, he was living at Catholic seminaries in New Jersey and New York. Nonetheless, to claim that Diệm's appeal depended mainly or entirely on his Catholic status is to overlook the fact that there were many non-Catholics among his American admirers. (Wesley Fishel was Jewish, for example.) Neither is it correct to suggest that Diệm's supporters were exclusively or disproportionately drawn from the ranks of American conservatives. In addition to attracting the attention of prominent conservatives like Donovan, Diệm also caught the eye of liberals such as Senator Mike Mansfield and the journalist Gouverneur Paulding. Indeed, the roster of American boosters which Diệm assembled during the early 1950s is

notable for its inclusion of liberals and conservatives alike, as well as for its ecumenical and bipartisan qualities.

What, then, accounts for Diệm's ability to garner the support of these American notables? As virtually every account of Diệm's career has stressed, part of his appeal to Americans lay in his staunch anticommunism. Diệm's stint in the US coincided with the high-water mark of McCarthyism, a period in which anticommunism dominated American politics as never before or since. Anticommunist credentials were certainly *de rigueur* for any foreign leader who hoped to win American support for his cause. It is therefore not surprising to discover, as the political scientist George Kahin did in 1953, that Diệm "had developed some understanding of the importance of anticommunism in American domestic politics."[42] Diệm would have been dense indeed had he failed to grasp this obvious fact.

But if anticommunism was necessary to Diệm's campaign to attract American support during the early 1950s, it was hardly sufficient to ensure the success of that campaign. By itself, anticommunism did not distinguish Diệm from the French and Bảo Đại, who retained their statuses as the official US allies in Indochina. Diệm therefore made sure that he appealed at least as frequently to US anticolonial sentiment as he did to American anxieties about communism. Some historians have suggested that, especially with respect to US policy towards Indochina during the 1950s, American dislike for European colonialism was overruled by Cold War considerations.[43] This was true for many officials in the executive branch of the US government and especially in the State Department, where Atlanticist concerns about maintaining good relations with Paris held sway. The tepid response in Washington to Diệm and his anti-French views in the fall of 1950 thus reflected the willingness within the Truman administration to put anticolonial concerns to the side, at least where Indochina was concerned. However, in opposition to this official view, there were many other Americans—including Americans of some repute and influence—who were increasingly suspicious and critical of French intentions and French policies in Indochina, and who rejected the Truman administration's view that the "Bảo Đại solution" was the best arrangement possible under the circumstances.[44] These were the Americans who were most likely to lend active support to a "third force" in Vietnam, and Diệm therefore undertook to cultivate them.

Diệm's ability to blend anticolonial and anticommunist convictions into a compelling bid for US support was apparent in the writings and speeches he produced for American readers and audiences. In a memorandum he delivered to New York Congresswoman Edna Kelly in mid-1951, Diệm described Indochina as "the cockpit of a three-cornered struggle" among colonialism, communism and "the spirit of nationalism and independence." Declaring that "colonialism is a goad that is driving the people into the arms of the communists," Diệm called on the United States to abandon its existing policy and to pressure the French to withdraw from Indochina. He reassured Kelly that a "Third Force" already existed in Vietnam, and that is "has no taint of colonialism and is anti-communist to the death." In particular, he singled out the Catholic districts of Phát Diệm and Bui Chu in northern Việtnam as a "Third Force zone" which might eventually contribute as many as six divisions of soldiers for the Third Force cause.[45]

The emphasis which Diệm placed on Phát Diệm and Bui Chu (which had the highest concentrations of Catholics in all of Vietnam) showed that his immediate goals were still centered on the shoring up of Catholic power within Vietnam. Significantly, however, Diệm refrained in this document from identifying himself or his supporters as Catholics, and merely noted that "many" members of the Third Force were "Christians". Their Christian status was important, Diệm suggested, primarily because it demonstrated that "these people understand true Western values" and that they "are not anti-West but anticolonialist."[46] In subsequent appeals to Americans, Diệm continued to emphasize this Vietnamese affinity for "Western values" much more than he emphasized his Catholic or Christian identity. Indeed, his references to the Christian bases of Third Force support eventually all but disappeared from his public statements to Americans, even as he continued to assert the fundamental compatibility of Vietnamese convictions with American values and beliefs.[47] Contrary to what some scholars have suggested, Diệm's appeals for American aid were framed mainly in secular, rather than religious terms; he did not view the prospect of US support as a potential Christian alliance.[48]

Instead of relying on notions of religious solidarity to win American support, Diệm was more inclined to appeal to American beliefs about development, modernization and the transformative capacity of US technology. In particular, Diệm sought to exploit the new US interest in the utility of what Americans called "technical assistance" to

foreign nations. In 1949, US President Harry Truman announced the "Point Four" program which dramatically increased levels of non-military US foreign aid. Though Point Four was a direct descendant of the 1947 Marshall Plan for the reconstruction of Western Europe, it was global in scale and included a broader range and variety of aid types. In addition to grants and subsidies, the "technical assistance" to be provided under the new program also included equipment, training and expert knowledge. As many scholars have pointed out, Point Four heralded a new American confidence in the country's ability to shape economic, political and social change around the world through the dissemination of US ideas, aid and technical expertise.[49] As a battlefront in the ongoing struggle against global communism, Vietnam appeared to many American officials to be in especially desperate need of the help that Point Four was designed to provide. By the time that Diệm arrived in the US in 1950, a small American technical assistance program was already operating in Indochina, and US technical aid to the Associated States steadily increased thereafter.[50]

In his efforts to shape the form and content of US technical assistance to Vietnam, Diệm received the invaluable help of his friend Wesley Fishel. Fishel was well positioned to assist Diệm in this regard because in 1951 he joined the faculty at Michigan State College (soon to be renamed Michigan State University). During the 1950s, under the energetic leadership of University President John Hannah, Michigan State spearheaded several government-sponsored technical assistance projects to provide expert training and instruction to countries such as Brazil, Columbia and Okinawa.[51] Soon after arriving at Michigan State, Fishel arranged for Diệm to work there as a consultant. This afforded the two men with the chance to work together on a proposal for a new technical assistance project for Vietnam. The 1952 letter in which Fishel presented the proposal to the US Mutual Security Administration clearly bore the Professor's influence, insofar as it envisioned a project for Vietnam that was essentially similar to the other Michigan State ventures. But the letter also reflected ideas that were obviously contributed by Diệm, such as the stipulation that the program should be based in Diệm's hometown of Huế in central Vietnam. The scope of the proposed project—which would have been much broader than the existing Michigan State programs—also seems to have defined largely by Diệm. He declared that Vietnam needed help in areas as diverse as

"police science," "foreign trade problems" and even "studies for the adoption of democratic institutions."[52]

Diệm's proposals for a technical assistance program did not have an immediate effect on US policy for Indochina. Nonetheless, he could still take comfort in the fact that there were many Americans in Washington and elsewhere who responded enthusiastically to his call for an American-Vietnamese alliance against colonialism and communism. The episode during Diệm's exile that best demonstrates his success in this regard took place at a luncheon in Washington on 8 May 1953. The event was hosted by Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, who had been introduced to Diệm following Douglas' return from a 1952 visit to Indochina. Douglas had been persuaded of the need for a "third force" solution during that trip, and he organized the luncheon so that Diệm could meet other like-minded Americans. These included two freshmen Senators who were destined to play key roles in Diệm's future relations with the US: Mike Mansfield of Montana and John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts.[53] Mansfield and Kennedy had also recently traveled to Indochina and become converts to the "third force" cause. The Senators and their fellow diners were all impressed with Diệm, who spoke forcefully against Bảo Đại and the prospects for independence within the French Union, and who also regaled his listeners with an account of his 1946 meeting with Ho Chi Minh.[54] As Mansfield later recalled, he left the lunch "with the feeling that if anyone could hold South Vietnam, it was somebody like Ngo Dinh Diem."[55]

During the lunch, Diệm informed the other guests that he intended to travel to France a few weeks hence in order to try to capitalize on the weariness with the Indochina war that seemed to be taking hold there, and hoped from their eventually to return to Vietnam.[56] Of course, neither Diệm nor anyone else at the lunch that day could have predicted the stunning series of events which would take place over the next twelve months and which would culminate, almost exactly a year to the day later, in the surrender of the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu to the Việt Minh. But even if he did not anticipate these events, Diệm would nonetheless be well positioned to exploit them. After two-and-a-half years in the US, Diệm sensed that the time had come to move on. As it turned out, his instincts were correct. The coming year would provide Diệm with his best chance yet to make a bid for power.

V. Brother's Keeper: The emergence of Nhu and the triumph of Diệm, 1953-54

During the flurry of diplomacy and debate which surrounded Diệm's elevation to the SVN premiership in the spring of 1954, many observers questioned Diệm's suitability for the post. Some French and American officials suggested that Diệm's career and his lack of tenure in high office made him unsuited to hold such an important position. They also asserted that Diệm's years of foreign exile ensured that he was aloof from and out-of-touch with events and political sentiments in Saigon.[57] Later writings about Diệm have echoed these pronouncements. Historians and others have portrayed Diệm as isolated and floating almost helplessly on a sea of intrigue following his return to Saigon in June 1954. For these authors, Diệm was subsequently able to retain and consolidate his authority not by virtue of his own political judgment and skill—he is usually deemed to have been entirely lacking in those—but only because of the staunch support of the United States government.

Rigorous examination of the available historical evidence does not support these arguments, however. For example, the claims about Diệm's dependence on US support are undermined by the fact American official support for Diệm remained decidedly tepid for almost a year after his appointment. Similarly, the representation of Diệm as politically incompetent and isolated does not stand up to careful scrutiny. Besides being reminiscent of racist arguments about the necessity of "tutelage" for colonized peoples—i.e., Diệm declined to serve in the Indochinese colonial regime, *ergo* he was unqualified to preside over a postcolonial Vietnam—this representation of Diệm is undermined by considerable evidence that he was far from being isolated or politically helpless in the spring of 1954. On the contrary, Diệm was kept well-informed of developments in Indochina and seems to have coordinated his overseas activities with those of his allies back in Saigon. His political fortunes within Vietnam, moreover, were actually on the rise from at least the fall of 1953.

Diệm's accomplishments in these respects were partly a product of his sharp political instincts and his sheer determination to succeed. But they were also due in no small measure to the efforts of his younger brother Ngô Đình Nhu, who had remained in Vietnam to work on Diệm's behalf during the latter's exile. Nhu's ideas about politics

and society were not always identical to Diệm's, but he was loyal and tireless in his support of his elder brother. In the years after 1954, Diệm would come to rely heavily on Nhu for everything from tactics and intelligence to philosophy and ideology. This reliance was foreshadowed during the early 1950s, when Nhu designed and implemented the political strategies that helped carry Diệm to power.

Up until 1950, Ngô Đình Nhu's career had been strikingly different from that of his three well-known older brothers. Khôi, Thục and Diệm had all displayed the same penchant from an early age of mixing politics and religion; moreover, the three of them had been collaborating with each on a variety of intrigues since at least the early 1930s.[58] Nhu, however, was separated from his older brothers by both age and temperament. Almost a full decade younger than Diệm, Nhu was considered to be quiet and thoughtful as a young man and generally avoided public attention. During the 1930s, while the three oldest Ngô brothers were embroiled in Court politics in Huế, Nhu was studying in Paris, first taking a degree in literature and then studying paleography and librarianship at the famous Ecole des Chartres. He returned to Vietnam in the late 1930s and embarked on a career as an archivist, and by 1945 had attained a senior post at the National Library in Hanoi.[59] After the August Revolution, Nhu seems to have become more interested in helping his older brothers to organize support among Vietnamese Catholics.[60] Still, he seems to have maintained a relatively low profile down until the time that Diệm departed for his American exile. Along with his young wife Trần Lê Xuân—later to gain international infamy as "Madame Nhu"—Nhu in 1950 was living in relative obscurity in the town of Dalat in the southern highlands, where he indulged in his hobby of raising orchids.[61]

Like all of the Ngô brothers, Nhu was both a devout Catholic and a staunch Confucian. However, just as his education and early career were distinct from those of his brothers, so too did the evolution of his ideas and his politics follow a rather different course. While studying in France during the 1930s, Nhu encountered the ideas of the lay Catholic philosopher Emmanuel Mounier. Mounier had been inspired by the Great Depression and the suffering it caused to develop a critique of liberal capitalism. Specifically, he decried the liberal preoccupation with individualism and argued that it led inevitably to isolation, alienation and exploitation.[62] Yet, as a conservative Catholic,

Mounier was unwilling to embrace Marxism because its materialist precepts gave short shrift to what he called the "spiritual" dimensions of human nature. Instead of capitalism or communism, Mounier looked forward to a post-capitalist social order in which both individual material needs and communal prosperity would receive their due—but without either one becoming the primary concern of social policy.[63] Instead, Mounier proposed to focus attention on the development of the total *person*, which he defined as inclusive of spiritual needs as well as material. Mounier's emphasis on the person as an antidote to the individual was a central theme of his writings, and it led him to adopt the term "Personalism" as a description of his ideas.[64]

Under Mounier's influence, Nhu became an enthusiastic Personalist. After returning from France in the late 1930s, Nhu began to consider how Personalism—which he translated into Vietnamese as *Nhân Vị*— might be applied in Vietnam. After 1945, the possibility that Personalism might represent a "third path" to social development seems to have become particularly attractive to Nhu, in part because it promised a philosophical counterpart to the "third force" politics which his brother was promoting. For Nhu, Mounier's rejection of both liberalism and communism became congruent to Diệm's determination to eschew both the French colonialists and the Việt Minh. That Nhu found his older brother to be receptive to his ideas is reflected in the fact that Diệm's remarks and writings from this period contain references to terms adopted from the Personalist lexicon.[65]

After 1950, Nhu became the leading champion of the efforts to mobilize support for Diệm among non-communist Vietnamese. At the same time, Nhu also became more ardent and vocal in expressing his views on Personalism as a guide for Vietnam's future social and political development. In April of 1952, Nhu outlined these views in a talk to Vietnamese Army officers at the new military academy in Dalat. Entitled "The Contribution of the Catholic to Peace in Vietnam", the speech acknowledged that the concept of *nhân vị* was a Catholic idea, but insisted that it had a universal relevance and utility, especially in war-torn Vietnam. Addressing the non-Catholics who made up the majority of his audience, Nhu declared, "the anxieties of Catholics are as an echo answering the worries that are roiling your own hearts and souls." All Vietnamese of all political and religious backgrounds, Nhu argued, had to join together in "a sudden and

fierce unanimity" in order to "preserve the person" (*bảo vệ nhân vị*) against the forces which threatened to crush it. These opposing forces included liberalism and communism, both of which offered only "false liberation" and perpetual war.[66]

Though his audience did not know it at the time, Nhu's speech was a harbinger of things to come. Besides being long, dense and abstract—qualities of Nhu's which many Vietnamese would come to know and resent over the ensuing decade—the speech featured many of the key themes which would characterize Diệm and Nhu's later speeches and pronouncements about the utility and value of Personalism. These themes included not only the dangers posed by liberalism and communism but also the importance of "spiritual" concerns as opposed to mere material considerations. In addition, the speech also highlighted Nhu's conviction that what Vietnam needed was nothing less than a thoroughgoing revolution:

> These are great undertakings, and they can be summarized as a politico-economic revolution [*một cuộc cách mạng chính-trị kinh-tế*], aimed at making the person the focus of concern. I say "revolution" because it will be a great waste if we try to patch over the fissures in a creaky house, when what is needed is to transform the entire internal structure of the house.[67]

Like Diệm, Nhu clearly understood by the early 1950s that the creation of a "third force" in Vietnam would depend on more than mere promises to return to ancient traditions, values and practices. In order to succeed, such a movement would have to promote transformation and revolution—albeit along non-communist lines. Moreover, such a movement would have to transcend the sectarianism of late colonial Indochinese politics and win the support of Vietnamese with a wide range of religious and political affiliations. Nhu believed that Personalism, despite its Catholic origins, could form the basis of a new universal ideology that would appeal to Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

If Nhu fancied himself as a philosopher, he also knew that the movement he envisioned would also require a great deal of political organizing. As it turned out, his true talents lay much more with the latter than the former. Perhaps as early as 1950, Nhu had formed the nucleus of a new political party which he eventually dubbed the *Đảng Cần Lao Nhân Vị*; in subsequent years, he would variously translate this name as the "Personalist Labor Party" or the "Labor Party for Human Dignity".[68] At its inception, the Cần Lao organization seems to have operated entirely in secret, and little is known about

the early years of its existence. The party functioned as a network of cells, and recruits generally knew the identities of only a handful of their fellow members. After 1954, the existence of the party was officially acknowledged, but its activities still remained mostly confined to the shadows. Eventually the Cần Lao would become the most infamous and most feared component of Diệm and Nhu's security apparatus. But in its early years, Nhu's key objective was to collect information and to mobilize support for a new nationalist political movement with Diệm at its head.

The name which Nhu selected for his political party was revealing. The inclusion of *nhân vị* reflected the influence of Personalism on his thinking. But the use of *cần lao* (meaning "labor" or "hard work") was also significant because it reflected Nhu's intense interested in the latent political potential of the Vietnamese working masses. Contrary to what some observers have supposed, this interest in labor organizing (where "labor" was understood to include both industrial workers and poor tenant farmers) stemmed less from Nhu's admiration of Marxist-Leninist strategies than it did from his embrace of certain ideas associated with French syndicalism. In particular, Nhu embraced the syndicalist notion that workers should be organized into groups such as unions or cooperatives to ensure that their interests would not be subordinated to the interests of capital. Though Nhu tended in his public and private discourse to place the accent on the Personalist elements of his philosophy, the style and substance of his organizing efforts nonetheless bore the imprint of these syndicalist principles.[69]

In addition to the secret activities of the Cần Lao, Nhu also undertook more overt kinds of organizing. These public initiatives included his alliance with a labor activist named Trần Quốc Bửu. Only two years younger than Nhu, Bửu was already a veteran political organizer in 1950 and had been affiliated at various times with Trotskyism, the Cao Đài and the Việt Minh. In the late 1940s, after becoming disillusioned with Communism, Bửu fell in with a French labor organizer who educated him in the ideas and tactics of the Christian Democratic trade union movement. After a brief stint in Europe, Bửu returned to Việt Nam in 1949 and began illegally unionizing urban and rural workers. In 1952, a liberalization of the SVN's labor laws permitted Bửu to legalize his confederation of unions under the moniker of "the Vietnamese Confederation of Christian Workers" and to affiliate with the Brussels-based International Federation of

Christian Trade Unions.[70] Its not clear when and how Bửu and Nhu began to collaborate with each other, but Nhu had become closely associated with Bửu's Confederation by 1953. In February of that year, Nhu began publishing a journal in Saigon entitled *Xã Hội* (Society), and he printed several articles supportive of Bửu and the Confederation.[71] Besides coming out in support of unionism, *Xã Hội* also staunchly supported the creation of workers' and farmers' cooperatives—a stance which prefigured the policies that Diệm and Nhu would implement later as leaders of South Vietnam.[72]

Having secured the backing of Bửu and his unions, Nhu began in mid-1953 to plot a bold new political move to bolster Diệm's campaign to secure the SVN premiership. To accomplish this, Nhu knew that he would have to tread carefully. On the one hand, he needed to discredit Bảo Đại's strategy of seeking independence within the framework of the French Union; but on the other hand, he would have to be restrained in his criticism, lest the emperor become so annoyed with the Ngô brothers that he would reject Diệm's candidacy. Fortunately for Nhu, events soon provided him with exactly the kind of opportunity he needed. In July 1953, the French government proposed a new round of talks with the governments of the Associated States aimed at "perfecting" their independence within the French Union. Had the French made such an offer in 1949 or 1950, it might have been viewed as a validation of Bảo Đại's strategy. But by 1953, Vietnamese nationalists had grown impatient with the French failure to deliver on earlier promises, and the prospect of a new round of talks only fueled their anxieties about French sincerity. Nhu adroitly exploited these anxieties by quietly circulating a proposal for an unofficial "Unity Congress" (Đại Hội Đoàn Kết) to take place in Saigon in early September, after Bảo Đại's departure for France. The idea of a Congress was quickly embraced by many nationalist leaders, including not only Bishop Thục of the Catholics, but also the Cao Đài "pope" Phạm Công Tắc, General Trần Văn Soái of the Hòa Hảo, and General Lê Văn Viên of the Binh Xuyên. Most of the leading secular political factions (such as the Đại Việt, Đồng Minh Hội and VNQDĐ parties) also agreed to attend. General Viên even consented to let the Congress take place at Binh Xuyên headquarters.

The Unity Congress on 5-6 September was a chaotic affair. The 55 delegates in attendance endorsed a statement which fiercely denounced Bảo Đại's strategy of seeking

piecemeal concessions from the French. Almost immediately after the statement was released, however, the participants began to bicker about its implications. General Viên became concerned that the Congress was getting out of control, and brought the event to a premature end by closing the conference hall after just two days of meetings. Cao Đài leaders, who had been implicitly critical of Bảo Đại in remarks issued before the conference, now joined with Viên and with Hỏa Hào leaders in sending a telegram to the emperor to assure him of their continuing loyalty. Nhu, for his part, tried to distance himself from some of the harshest of the anti-Bảo Đại statements by denying that the Congress had adopted an official political stance. As an exercise in coalition building, the Unity Congress was an abject failure.[73]

For Nhu, however, the real objectives of the Unity Congress had less to do with fostering unity than with forcing the hand of Bảo Đại. In this regard, the event turned out eventually to be a brilliant success. From France, Bảo Đại sought to regain the political high ground by announcing that an official "National Congress" would take place in Saigon in October. The Cao Đài, Hòa Hảo and Binh Xuyên agreed to participate, along with representatives of most other nationalist groups, including several Catholic factions. Nhu and his allies, not surprisingly, were conspicuously absent when the National Congress convened on 12 October 1953. At first, the Congress seemed likely to deliver the expected affirmation of support for Bảo Đại and his policies. But on 16 October, the delegates suddenly approved a resolution that rejected participation in the French Union in favor of "total independence." Bảo Đại loyalists subsequently managed to push through an amendment which qualified the rejection with the statement that an independent Vietnam would not remain in the Union "in its present form." But the damage had been done. Intended as a show of nationalist support for Bảo Đại, the National Congress had instead revealed the extent of the nationalist dissatisfaction with the emperor and his strategy of seeking independence via piecemeal concessions.[74]

Diệm, Nhu and their supporters were initially angry over their exclusion from the October Congress.[75] They soon realized, however, that the unexpected outcome of the affair had prompted Bảo Đại to take a friendlier approach to Diệm and to revisit the possibility of appointing him to the premiership. Even before the National Congress opened, Bảo Đại consented to meet privately with Diệm in Paris; it was their first face-to-

face meeting in four years.[76] Then, in the wake of the Congress debacle, the emperor became even more conciliatory. In a longer second meeting with Diệm in Cannes on 26 October, the emperor broached the possibility of Diệm's appointment to the premiership with a "hypothetical" inquiry about Diệm's willingness to serve.[77] The emperor would put off a final decision on this matter for some months after this meeting; nonetheless, it was clear that Nhu's political gambit was already paying big dividends. Bảo Đại's prestige and standing among his subjects had been shown to be miserably low. Diệm's anti-French stance, in contrast, appeared to be very much in keeping with the general tenor of nationalist sentiment in Saigon, and therefore seemed increasingly to be something that the emperor could ill afford to do without.

These developments in Saigon and France during the summer and fall of 1953—and Nhu's pivotal role in them—have been downplayed or ignored by historians.[78] They nonetheless seem to have had rather important consequences, especially with regards to Bảo Đại's pivotal decision in the spring of 1954 to appoint Diệm as premier of the State of Vietnam. This finding has important implications for our understanding of Diệm's rise to power and the alleged involvement of the US in securing his appointment. Historians and other observers have long asserted that American officials pressured Bảo Đại to select Diệm; these authors have variously offered Diệm's connections to US policymakers, his Catholicism and his reputation for staunch anticommunism as the motives which prompted the US to act on his behalf.[79] David L. Anderson, however, has pointed out that executive branch leaders in the US were at most only "vaguely aware" of Diệm in early 1954, and that declassified documents produced by various US agencies do not support the allegations of a secret US pressure campaign on Diệm's behalf. Instead, Anderson argues that Bảo Đại chose Diệm because he was the leader who was most likely to be able to secure a new commitment of American support for the SVN regime.[80]

The evidence presented here suggests that Anderson's explanation is correct but incomplete. In addition to international considerations, Bảo Đại's decision was crucially shaped by concerns about domestic Vietnamese politics. By the spring of 1954, events had provided powerful validation of Diệm's decision to hold out for "true" independence from France. Even before the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, the popularity of Diệm's stance on the independence issue as compared to Bảo Đại's had been apparent. The fall

of the French garrison in early May 1954 only seemed to confirm the political wisdom of Diệm's arguments. Moreover, the events of the previous fall in Saigon had demonstrated convincingly that even when Diệm was in exile, Nhu and his allies in Vietnam were able to wield considerable political clout on Diệm's behalf. As Bảo Đại himself later acknowledged in his memoirs, the esteem in which Diệm and Nhu were held by their fellow nationalists was a crucial part of the emperor's political calculus:

> From my earlier experience with him, I knew that Diem had a difficult character. I was also aware of his fanaticism and his messianic tendencies. But, in the present situation, there was no better choice. He was well-known to the Americans, who appreciated his intransigence. In their eyes, he was the man best suited for the job, and Washington would not be sparing in its support of him. Because of [Diệm's] past and because of the presence of his brother at the head of the 'Movement for National Union', he would have the cooperation of the fiercest nationalists, those who had brought down Tam and then Buu-Loc. Finally, because of his intransigence and his fanaticism, he could be counted on to resist communism. Yes, he was truly the right man for the situation.[81]

Historians have so far failed to turn up any documentary evidence of a secret US plot to persuade Bảo Đại to appoint Diệm as premier in the spring of 1954. But even if such a plot had been hatched and executed, it could not have had much of an effect on the emperor's decision. By May of 1954, Bảo Đại had been overtaken by events and outmaneuvered by Diệm and Nhu. He was left with little choice but to offer Diệm the premiership on the terms that Diệm had long demanded: "full powers" over all aspects of the SVN military, administration and economy. Some two decades after the emperor had first encountered Diệm and his famous obstinacy, Bảo Đại was now obliged to yield. As a result, Diệm finally had the political opening which he had sought with such determination for so long. He would make good use of it.

VI. Conclusion: The "National Revolution" of 1954-1955

At a meeting with Bảo Đại in Paris on 18 June 1954, Diệm formally agreed to form a government, and thus returned to political office for the first time in more than two decades. His political prospects were far from secure. The state he took over had

been created and sponsored by a colonial regime that was now humiliated and discredited. American officials for the moment remained deeply divided among themselves over whether or not to support him. SVN authority was mostly limited to Vietnam's large cities and towns, and the countryside was a patchwork of *de facto* independent satrapies. In the capital of Saigon, Diệm's power was further hamstrung by the fact that the local police force was firmly under control of the Binh Xuyên. The Vietnamese National Army was commanded by Francophile generals who were deeply suspicious of Diệm. Within weeks of taking office, Diệm's effective control was further reduced by the announcement that the French and the DRV had reached an agreement at Geneva to partition Vietnam at the 17th parallel. The accords also called for nationwide elections to reunify the country by 1956; but few observers expected that Diệm would be able to remain in power that long.

And yet, despite the apparent hopelessness of his situation, Diệm remained stubbornly optimistic and confident. "The hour of decision has arrived," he declared in a speech delivered in Paris prior to his departure for Saigon. Despite the formidable combination of forces arrayed against him, Diệm sensed that his ambitions were at last within reach. Amazingly, he was right. Over the next sixteen months, Diệm not only defied the predictions of his demise, but also succeeded in neutralizing or eliminating most of the active resistance to his government. Having first outmaneuvered the hostile generals in charge of the Vietnamese National Army in the fall of 1954, Diệm was strong enough by the spring of 1955 to provoke a showdown with the Binh Xuyên and their sect allies. The resulting "Battle of Saigon" in May ended with the Binh Xuyên routed and driven from the capital. By early summer, government forces loyal to Diệm were on the offensive all across South Vietnam, and by the end of the year only small pockets of active resistance remained. Buoyed by his success, Diệm undertook to complete his ascent to the pinnacle of power by ousting the man who had appointed him. On 25 October 1955, Diệm announced that he had overwhelmingly defeated Bảo Đại in a referendum held days earlier. He also proclaimed the creation of a new state known as the Republic of Vietnam, and declared himself to be its first President.

How was Diệm able to accomplish this? Most accounts at the time and since have asserted that the staunch support of the United States government on Diệm's behalf

was the critical factor. According to this view, Diệm succeeded by dint of an overt program of US aid and support combined with a series of covert Central Intelligence Agency operations. The best-known element of the overt assistance program during this period involved the transport of hundreds of thousands of refugees from North Vietnam to the South in US Ships. Since most of the refugees were Catholics, it has been supposed that the overall effect of "Operation Exodus" was to provide Diệm with a crucial infusion of loyal supporters at a critical time. Similarly, the covert activities of a CIA team led by Col. Edward Lansdale are alleged to have delivered South Vietnam into Diệm's hands. In addition to conducting sabotage and psychological warfare operations in the North, Lansdale and his agents intrigued with various political and religious leaders in the South and distributed bribe money on Diệm's behalf. The critical importance of these covert actions seems to be confirmed by declassified US documents and by Lansdale's memoirs, which depict Lansdale and his men as clever heroes who provided timely help and advice to a hapless and naïve Diệm.[82]

Many historians have accepted and repeated the claims of Lansdale and others about the critical role of US aid and actions during 1954-1955. But a close examination of the historical evidence suggests that these claims are at best grossly overstated. The transportation of Catholic refugees from the north certainly provided long-term political benefits to Diệm by expanding the size of his core constituency in the south. But in the short term, the refugees—many of whom were destitute and in desperate need of food, clothing, resettlement and employment—were more of a liability than an advantage. Similarly, the sabotage and "psywar" operations undertaken by Lansdale's operatives in North Vietnam had little impact on the situation in the South or on Diệm's immediate prospects for survival there. Finally, the record shows that the Americans' advice to Diệm about various issues, though frequently offered during 1954-1955, was almost as frequently disregarded.

Instead of relying on the Americans, Diệm and Nhu designed and implemented their own strategy to build and consolidate the authority of their new regime. This strategy had two main components. The first component was a mostly secret program of persuasion and intrigue among the various factions, sects and groups who were contending for power in South Vietnam. During the fall and winter of 1954-1955, Nhu

worked behind the scenes to divide and isolate the regime's rivals. By using the relationships that he had previously cultivated, Nhu was able to build critical support for the regime among key sect and party leaders and also among the officer corps of the Vietnamese National Army. The alliances that Nhu built during this period were not always durable; many of the figures who rallied to the regime in 1954 and 1955 would later become disillusioned with Diệm and Nhu, and more than a few of them eventually found themselves in armed opposition, in prison or in exile. In the near term, however, the support of these figures would prove crucial in the palace's efforts to fend off challenges to its authority—most notably those mounted by Army commander Nguyễn Văn Hinh in the fall of 1954 and Binh Xuyên chief Lê Văn Viên in the spring of 1955.[83]

The other key component of Diệm and Nhu's strategy in 1954-1955 was a public campaign to generate popular support for the new government. Again, Nhu's earlier political activities proved to be an invaluable asset. Time and again during 1954 and 1955, the Cần Lao party and Trần Quốc Bửu's labor unions were mobilized to participate in huge pro-Diệm rallies in Saigon and other South Vietnamese cities. This campaign was aimed at more than merely showcasing the regime's ability to organize mass demonstrations, however. In fact, it was intended primarily to build support among those sectors of the South Vietnamese population who remained unconvinced of Diệm's worthiness and ability as a national leader. Contrary to what some authors have suggested, Diệm and Nhu were quite concerned about their general lack of public support in Vietnam at the time of Diệm's ascension to power. With the Geneva-mandated deadline for the reunification of Vietnam looming in 1956, the possibility of an electoral face-off between Diệm and the better-known Hồ Chí Minh remained a real possibility. It was therefore essential to demonstrate that Diệm was possessed of his own revolutionary vision for the modernization and development of Vietnam.

Even before Diệm had returned from exile in June of 1954, Nhu had already selected the term that would serve as a short-hand description of the regime's program: the "National Revolution" (*Cách Mạng Quốc Gia*)[84]. On its face, it seemed a bizarre choice. The "National Revolution" was well-known throughout the French empire as the official slogan of Marshall Pétain and the Vichy regime during World War II. Of course, Diệm and Nhu's avowed republicanism precluded the possibility that they might

represent themselves as Pétainists. Similarly, as anti-French nationalists, Diệm and Nhu appeared to have little to gain by associating themselves with the pro-Vichy colonial governor of Indochina, Admiral Jean Decoux.[85] Nonetheless, the invocation of the "National Revolution" was a deliberate and rather shrewd move designed to stir Vietnamese nationalist sentiment. As the historian Eric T. Jennings has demonstrated, the export of Pétainist ideology from the metropole to the colonies during the early 1940s often had complex and unintended consequences. In their efforts to "adapt" Pétainism to specific colonial locales, Vichy officials ended up deploying their rhetoric in ways that made it available for appropriation.[86] In the case of Indochina, the language, ideology and practices of the Decoux regime lingered on in unexpected ways following the sudden demise of the regime itself in March 1945. Thus, the political thinking of the "Generation of 1945" who came of age in the years and months before the August Revolution was framed by the slogans, symbols and institutions of the Vichy era. This may have been especially true for the Vietnamese nationalists who had resisted or become disillusioned with the Việt Minh—and it was precisely this group whose support Diệm hoped to attract.

In some respects, the Diệmist "National Revolution" of 1954-1955 was a stunning success. By the end of 1955, Diệm had routed his enemies and extended the effective control of his government over almost the entire territory of South Vietnam. He had founded a new state, the Republic of Vietnam, and was preparing to promulgate a new constitution which enshrined the republican principles that he had long espoused. Meanwhile, the US government had abandoned its initial ambivalence towards Diệm, and now lavished his regime with economic, military and technical aid. When Diệm had been appointed to office in 1954, it was widely presumed that all of Vietnam would be under communist control within two years; but as the Geneva deadline for all-Vietnam elections came and went in the summer of 1956, it was clear that Diệm had acquired formidable power and that he would retain it for the foreseeable future.

As it turned out, Diệm's moment of triumph would be brief, and his vision was destined to remain largely unrealized. In the years after 1955, Diệm would continue to promote the political, social and economic transformations he envisioned; yet these goals proved to be ever more elusive as Diệm encountered a rising tide of resistance to his

policies and his rule. The decline of Diệm's fortunes was as complex and as unexpected as their rise had been. As many historians have observed, Diệm's demise was brought about not only by international and internal Vietnamese developments, but also by his own profound shortcomings as a leader. Yet, it does not follow from this that Diệm's fall was preordained or inevitable, or that he was somehow doomed to political ineptitude. Just as Diệm's political and personal shortcomings would be instrumental to his eventual undoing, so were his political instincts and his visionary qualities the primary agents of his brilliant and fleeting initial success.

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[1] Bernard Fall, *The Two Viet-Nams: A political and military analysis* (London, 1967) p. 235.

[2] Philip E. Catton, "Parallel Agendas: The Ngo Dinh Diệm Regime, the United States, and the Strategic Hamlet Program, 1961". Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio University, 1998. p. 16.

[3] In 1965, John Mecklin described Diệm's pre-1954 career as "an unbroken series of negative decisions: not to be a priest, not to study in France, not to remain in the Annamese cabinet, not to work for the Japanese or Ho Chi Minh or the French, and finally not to remain in his country during the period of its greatest peril." John Mecklin, *Mission in Torment: An Intimate Account of the U.S. role in Vietnam* (Garden City, NY, 1965) p. 31. Other accounts have echoed this interpretation. Frances Fitzgerald declared that Diệm did not participate in anticolonial politics during the 1930s and 1940s; she based this on the rather breathtaking assertion that Diệm "believed in government, not in politics." Frances Fitzgerald, *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam* (Boston, 1972), p. 82.

[4] Denis Warner, *The Last Confucian* (New York, 1963). The emphasis on Diệm's "traditional" way of thinking characterizes not only the writings of his detractors but also those of his admirers; see, for example, Anthony Bouscaren, *The Last of the Mandarins: Diem of Vietnam* (Pittsburgh, 1965). For some authors, Diệm's Catholicism and his Confucianism were functionally indistinguishable from each other. Bernard Fall declared that "It remains an open question whether Diệm was basically a Confucianist with a Catholic overlay, or vice versa, and one that is unimportant in evaluating his political behavior; ample justification can be found in either frame of reference for his paternalistic approach to what he considered to be proper relations between those who govern and those who are governed." (Fall, *The Two Vietnams*, p. 236.)

[5] Khả served first as deputy director of the French-sponsored "National Academy" (*Quốc Học*) during the late 1890s, and then was elevated to the post of Grand Chamberlain at the court of the Emperor Thành Thái. For his stint at the Academy, see Trinh Van Thao, *L'École Francaise En Indochine* (Paris, 1995), pp. 31-32; and Gouvernement Général de L'Indochine, *L'Annam Scolaire: De l'enseignement traditionnel annamite à l'enseignement moderne franco-indigène* (Hanoi, 1931), pp. 96-101. Vu Ngu Chieu reports that Khả was rewarded by the French for his service as a translator during French military campaigns against the remnants of the Can Vuong rebel movement. See Vu Ngu Chieu, "The Other Side of the 1945 Vietnamese Revolution." *Journal of Asian Studies*, 45: 2 (Feb 1986) pp. 293-328.

[6] Bai's struggles with the French are described in Bruce Lockhart, *The End of the Vietnamese Monarchy* (New Haven, 1993) pp. 60, 68-75, 83. For a somewhat sanitized history of Bài's career written after his death by a member of a rival Court faction, see Nguyễn Tiến Lãng, "Quelques Mandarins D'hier," *Bulletins Des Amis De Vieux Hué*, (1939, n. 2), pp. 131-138. For a more recent Catholic account, see Trần Quang Chu, *Hành Hương Giáo Phận* (internal Catholic Church publication, 2000) pp. 21-23.

[7] The best account of Diệm's appointment and resignation in 1933 is Lockhart, *The End of the Vietnamese Monarchy*, pp. 81-86.

[8] Piero Gheddo, [Charles Quinn, trans.] *The Cross and the Bo-Tree: Catholics and Buddhists in Vietnam* (New York, 1970) pp. 18-19.

[9] Thục's early career and his elevation to Bishop of Vĩnh Long in 1938 is described in Trần Quang Chu, *Hành Hương Giáo Phận*, pp.161-163.

[10] For surveys of the Japanese intrigues involving Vietnamese nationalists see Ralph Smith, "The Japanese Period in Indochina and the Coup of 9 March 1945." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 9: 2 (Sept 1978) pp. 268-301., Kiyoko Kurusu Nitz, "Independence without Nationalists? The Japanese and Vietnamese Nationalism during the Japanese Period, 1940-45." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 15: 1 (March 1984) pp. 108-133.; Tran My-Van, "Japan through Vietnamese Eyes (1905-1945)." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 30: 1 (March 1999) pp. 126-146; Tran My-Van, "Japan and Vietnam's Caodaists: A Wartime Relationship (1939-1945)." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 27: 1 (March 1996) pp. 179-193. On Cường Để's earlier career as an anti-French activist, see David Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885-1925* (Berkeley, 1971) pp. 102, 154-155, 216-217, 223-224, 236-238.

[11] In retrospect, of course, the "independence" that Imperial Japan granted to the nations it occupied during the early 1940s appears to have been little more than a cynical ploy to further the aims of Japanese militarism. But as Masaya Shiraishi points out, this does not mean that the idealists among the Japanese were insincere: "Objective historical appraisals of their actions aside, their good intentions and personal sense of mission cannot be denied. This gives us a glimpse of the historical fact that the ideals of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and Greater East Asian liberation, hollow though they were, had sufficient appeal to provide many Japanese with emotional support and justification of their war efforts and activities." Masaya Shiraishi, "The Background to the Formation of the Tran Trong Kim Cabinet in April 1945: Japanese Plans for Governing Vietnam" in Takashi Shiraishi and Motoo Furuta, eds. *Indochina in the 1940s and 1950s, v. 2* (Ithaca, 1992), pp. 113-141. The quotation is taken from footnote 20 on p. 116.

[12] Komatsu was francophone and had translated Malraux and Gide into Japanese; but he was also a liberal and a critic of French colonialism, and he befriended many of the leading Vietnamese nationalists of the early 1940s. See Nitz, "Independence without Nationalists?", p. 119.

[13] Vu Ngu Chieu, "The Other Side", p. 299. The Committee seems to have been intended as an umbrella organization for all of the various nationalist groups which had been collaborating with the Japanese. Besides Diệm, the other four members were Vũ Đình Dy, Lê Toân and Nguyễn Xuân Chữ (all linked to the pro-Japanese *Việt Nam Ái Quốc Đảng*) and Vũ Văn Hiền (who would later serve as Minister of Finance in the Trần Trọng Kim cabinet).

[14] Cường Để, *Cuộc Đời Cách Mạng* [A Revolutionary Life], (Saigon, 1957), p. 137-138. The envoy was one Phan Thúc Ngô.

[15] Lockhart, *End of the Vietnamese Monarchy*, pp. 131-133.

[16] Vu Ngu Chieu, "The Other Side", p. 306, fn. 14. For an account of Diệm's escape from Huế, see Nitz, "Independence without Nationalists?", p. 117.

[17] The idealist officer who proposed the establishment of a Cường Để-Ngô Đình Diệm government was Lieutenant Colonel Hidezumi Hayashi. Hayashi had met Diệm while the latter was in Japanese protective custody in Saigon in 1944. The commander of the Japanese garrison army who opposed the idealist elements of the Hayashi plan was Lieutenant General Yuichi Tsuchihashi. For an account of the drafting of the Hayashi plan and the bureaucratic struggle that ensued in early 1945, see Shiraishi, "Background to the formation of the Tran Trong Kim cabinet". Shiraishi's study is based on extensive work in Japanese archives and on interviews with key Japanese participants, including Hayashi.

[18] General Tsuchihashi reportedly decided to retain Bảo Đại after meeting the young emperor and being impressed by his "aristocratic qualities." See Nitz, "Independence without Nationalists?", p. 129.

[19] Bảo Đại's first telegram to Diệm was sent in mid-March, but Japanese officials in Saigon who opposed Diệm's appointment made sure that it was not delivered. By chance, Bảo Đại discovered in early April that the Japanese were keeping Diệm in the dark. He learned this from Trần Trọng Kim, who had met with Diệm during a stopover in Saigon en route to Huế from Bangkok, where Kim had been in exile. Kim was surprised and puzzled to learn that Diệm had not heard of the emperor's plans to form a new government. Diệm, for his part, was stunned upon hearing the news, and went immediately to the Japanese to complain about being cut out. See Trần Trọng Kim, *Một Cơn Gió Bụi [A Cloud of Dust]*. (Saigon, 1969), pp. 42-45. When Kim arrived in Huế a few days later, he informed Bảo Đại that Diệm had not received the emperor's initial summons and advised him to send a second message. (*Ibid.*, p. 48-52) This second telegram was delivered to Diệm.

[20] Diệm's reasons for rejecting Bảo Đại's request—and especially the question of whether or not Diệm was pressured by the Japanese—have been the subject of considerable debate for decades. However, recent research in French and Japanese archives has helped to clarify matters somewhat. Masaya Shiraishi reports that Diệm was advised by Hayashi to reject the offer on the grounds that the idealist scheme for "full" independence had been diluted. (See Shiraishi, "Formation of the Tran Trong Kim cabinet," p. 138; see also note 17 above.) Another important account of Diệm's decision is provided in Stein Tønnesson, *The Vietnamese Revolution of 1945: Roosevelt, Ho Chi Minh and de Gaulle in a World at War*. (Oslo, 1991), p. 285. Tønneson's account is based on a translated copy of Hayashi's diary, which Tønneson discovered in the French colonial archives, and which records both that Diệm rejected Bảo Đại's offer and then became angry some days later. Tønneson speculates that Diệm's refusal was a ploy to increase his leverage, and that he expected that the offer would be made again.

[21] The rumors of and preparations for Cường Để's return during summer 1945 are described in Nitz, "Independence without Nationalists?" pp. 128-129. For Diệm's alleged involvement in promoting the prince's return, see Trần Trọng Kim, *Một Cơn Gió Bụi*, pp. 62-64.

[22] Diệm was still in Saigon in August when he received an urgent request from Kim to come to Huế to serve on a "Committee of National Salvation." Accompanied by two other nationalist leaders, he set out for Huế with a Japanese military escort on 19 August; but the convoy was turned back at a Việt Minh barricade at Nha Trang (Tønneson, *Vietnamese Revolution of 1945*, p. 384).

[23] Some authors have asserted that Diệm's intrigues with the Japanese compromised his reputation as a nationalist among Vietnamese; see, for example, George Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York, 1986), p. 79. The evidence to support these assertions is difficult to find. Since Diệm's Japanese intrigues came to naught, it is hard to imagine how his opponents might have made the charges of collaboration stick. It is worth pointing out here that collaboration with Imperial Japan did not always carry the same political valence in Southeast Asia that it did in places such as China, Korea, Europe and the United States. Indeed, many of the post-1945 nationalist leaders of Southeast Asia (including Aung Sang in Burma, Roxas in the Philippines, Sihanouk in Cambodia and Sukarno in Indonesia) had collaborated to varying degrees with the Japanese during the early 1940s. Even the Việt Minh, whose resistance to the Japanese during the war was a point of pride afterwards, were quite willing to open their ranks to officials who had served in the Trần Trọng Kim government in 1945.

[24] In the late 1940s, Diệm told the journalist Ellen Hammer that Hồ had refused to satisfy his demands for "information on Viet Minh activities and plans." See Ellen J. Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina, 1940-1955* (Stanford, 1966), pp. 149-150. In 1953, Diệm asserted that he had asked Hồ for control of the Interior Ministry and the police, and that Hồ had considered this for some time before finally deciding against it. Memorandum of Conversation, Edmund S. Gullion, 8 May 1953, printed in *Foreign Relations of the United States 1952-1954*, vol. 13, *Indochina*, (Washington, 1982), pp. 553-554. [All citations from the *Foreign Relations* series hereafter designated as *FRUS*.]

[25] Ái Minh, *Thân Thế và Sự Nghiệp Ngô Tổng Thống* [The Life and Career of President Ngo], (Saigon, 1955), pp. 18-23; Huy Tuấn and Hoài Thịnh, *Thể Hiện Nhân Vị của Ngô Tổng Thống* [An exposition of the Personalism of President Ngo], (Saigon, 1956), p. 23; Phuc Thien, *President Ngo-Dinh-Diem's Political Philosophy* (Saigon, 1956), pp. 5-6.

[26] Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York, 1997) pp. 232-233. Diệm related substantially the same version to other US journalists during the early 1960s; see Robert Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution* (New York, 1965) p. 110; and Marguerite Higgins, *Our Vietnam Nightmare* (New York, 1965) pp. 157-158.

[27] The relevant French sources are described in Trần Thị Liên, "Les catholiques et la République Démocratique du Việt-Nam (1945-1954): Une approche biographique" in Christopher E. Goscha and Benoît de Tréglodé, eds., *Le Viêt Nam depuis 1945 : États, marges et constructions du passé*, (Paris, forthcoming in 2003).

[28] Bảo Đại's activities during this period are covered in Lockhart, *The End of the Vietnamese Monarchy*, pp. 165-171 and in Hammer *Struggle for Indochina*, pp. 208-216.

[29] Philippe Devillers, *Histoire du Viêt-Nam de 1940 à 1952* (Paris, 1952) p. 420. For Bảo Đại's account of the meeting, see Bảo Đại, *Le Dragon D'Annam*, p. 190. For Diệm's views of the French proposals and his concern about Bảo Đại's attitude, see Telegram, Hopper to Sec State, 20 December 1947, printed in *FRUS, 1947*, vol. 6, *The Far East*, (Washington, 1972), pp. 152-155.

[30] Devillers, *Histoire du Viêt-Nam*, pp. 425-429.

[31] Ngô Đình Diệm, "Lời tuyên bố của Chí-sĩ Ngô-đình-Diệm ngày 16 tháng 6 năm 1949" [declaration of Ngo Dinh Diem on 16 June 1949], reprinted in *Con Đường Chính nghĩa: độc lập dan chủ: Hiệu triệu và diễn văn quan trọng của Tổng Thống Ngô Đình Diệm [The way of the just cause: Independence and Democracy: Important speeches of President Ngô Đình Diệm]*. (Saigon, 1956), v. 1, pp. 221-222.

[32] *Ibid.*

[33] The assassination orders were intercepted by the French. See Telegram, Heath to Acheson, 28 July 1950, State Department Decimal File 751G.00/7-2850, Record Group 59, United States National Archives II, College Park, Maryland [hereafter RG 59, USNA2]. Diệm claimed later that the French told him about the plot, but insisted that they would be unable to protect him.

[34] Translation of Letter, Ngô Đình Diệm to Wesley Fishel, 3 June 1951, Wesley R. Fishel papers, Michigan State University Archives, Box 1184, Folder 33. Fishel is not specifically identified as the recipient of the letter, but the content and date strongly suggests that Diệm wrote it to him.

[35] Telegram, Gullion to Acheson, 24 January 1951, *FRUS, 1951*. Vol. 6, *Asia and the Pacific*. (Washington, 1977), pp. 359-361. See also Telegram, Heath to Acheson, 28 July 1950, State Department Decimal File 751G.00/7-2850, RG 59, USNA2. According to Gullion, who was the Chargé D'Affaires at the US Embassy in Saigon and who knew Diệm and Thục well, the Bảo Long scheme envisioned a joint regency shared by Cường Để and the Empress Nam Phương.

[36] Cường Để's final effort to return to his homeland is described in Hammer, *Struggle for Indochina*, p. 275. The Prince told an American acquaintance in 1950 that his main objective in returning to Indochina was to be able to die there, but he also admitted that he had discussed with Diệm the possibility that he still might yet play a political role. Memorandum of Conversation, Dallas Coors, 8 January 1951, State Department Decimal File 794.00/1-851, RG 59, USNA 2. Diệm later arranged for the prince's remains to be brought back to Vietnam for burial. *The Times of VN Weekly*, 21 April 1956, p. 8.

[37] Author interview with Prof. Ralph Smuckler, Washington DC, June 2001.

[38] For Fishel's account of his meeting with Diệm and Thục, see Memorandum of Conversation, Dallas Coors, 8 January 1951, State Department Decimal File 794.00/1-851, RG 59, USNA 2. For Komatsu's role in introducing Diệm to Fishel, see Demaree Bess, "Bright Spot in Asia", *Saturday Evening Post*, v. 229, n. 11 (Sept. 15, 1956) p. 130.

[39] Telegram, Acting Secretary of State to Saigon, 28 September 1950, printed in *FRUS, 1950*. Vol. 6 *Asia and the Pacific*. (Washington, 1976), pp. 884-886.

[40] Telegram, Acheson to Saigon, 16 January 1951, printed in *FRUS, 1951*. Vol. 6, p. 348. A slightly different version of the exchange between Diệm and Bảo Đại's representatives is recounted in Memorandum of Conversation, William O'Sullivan, 15 January 1951, US State Department Decimal File 751G.00/1-1551, RG 59, USNA2.

[41] Joseph Morgan, *The Vietnam lobby : the American Friends of Vietnam, 1955-1975*. (Chapel Hill, 1997), pp. 1-14. The Cardinal was Francis Cardinal Spellman of New York, who had met Thục in Rome during the 1930s. The Supreme Court Justice was William Douglas. The members of Congress who met Diệm during this period include Rep. Edna Kelly (D-NY), Sen. H. Alexander Smith (R-NJ), Rep. Walter Judd (R-MN), Rep. Clement Zablocki (D-WI), Senator Mike Mansfield (D-MT) and Senator John F. Kennedy (D-MA). Besides Wesley Fishel, the academics whom Diệm met during his exile in the US included I. Milton Sacks and George Kahin; however, unlike Sacks and Fishel, Kahin did not become an admirer of Diệm's.

[42] Kahin, *Intervention*, p. 93.

[43] Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia and the Cold War, 1945-1992* (8th ed., New York, 1997), pp. 107-108.

[44] Even within the State Department, there were some officials who resisted the administration's decision to embrace the Bảo Đại solution. This included some of the younger diplomats working in Indochina who continued to cultivate contacts among non-communist nationalist leaders and to search for a "third force" alternative to Bảo Đại after 1950. Diệm had already met some of these diplomats prior to his departure from Indochina in 1950, and his brothers Thục and Nhu maintained these relationships while he was in exile. Author interview with Gene Gregory, Ho Chi Minh City, March 2002.

[45] Ngo Dinh Diem, "Indo China" memorandum of July 1951, enclosed in Kelly to Mansfield, 20 July 1951, Mike Mansfield Papers, Series IV, Box 221, Folder 14. (I am grateful to Don Oberdorfer for providing me with a copy of this memorandum.) Kelly found Diệm's arguments as outlined in this memo to be quite persuasive. A few weeks later, she summoned a State Department official to complain about the US policy of providing aid to the French in Indochina; at this meeting, she described Bảo Đại as "just as much a Communist as Ho Chi Minh." Memorandum of Conversation with Congresswoman Edna F. Kelly, Merchant, 8 August 1951, *FRUS 1951*, vol. 6, *Asia and the Pacific*. (Washington, 1977). pp. 479-480.

[46] Ngo Dinh Diem, "Indo China" memorandum of July 1951.

[47] Diệm's tendency to eschew religious rhetoric is especially apparent in the speeches he delivered in the latter stages of his exile. See for example, Ngo Dinh Diem, "Recent Developments in Indochina", (Address delivered the fifth Annual Meeting of the Far Eastern Association, Cleveland, Ohio, 1 April 1951); and "Talk by Mr. Ngo Dinh Diem Before Southeast Asia Seminar, Cornell University" (20 February 1953). Copies of both of these speeches are available in the Cornell University Library.

[48] For the view that Christianity was the essence of Diệm's appeal to Americans, see Seth Jacobs, "'Sink or Swim with Ngo Dinh Diem': Religion, Orientalism and United States Intervention in Vietnam, 1950-1957." Ph.D. Dissertation, Northwestern University, 2000.

[49] The classic account of Point Four and its consequences is Robert Packenham, *Liberal America and the Third World: Political Development Ideas in Foreign Aid and Social Science* (Princeton, 1973). See also Sergei Shenin, *The United States and the Third World: The origins of the postwar relations and the Point Four program* (Commack NY, 2000).

[50] For an overview of the US technical assistance program to the Associated States, see "Indochina" in the *MSA Country Series* (Washington, 1952). See also the Mutual Security Agency pamphlet entitled "US Technical and Economic Assistance to the Far East: A Part of the Mutual Security Program for 1952-1953" (Washington, March 1952). [A copy of this pamphlet is contained in the US State Department Lot Files, Entry 1393, Box 1, RG 59, USNA2.] For some of the problems experienced in the early implementation of this program, see Telegram, Gullion to Acheson, 25 January 1951, printed in *FRUS, 1951*, vol. 6, *Asia and the Pacific*, pp. 361-362.

[51] Paul L. Dressel, *College to University: The Hannah Years at Michigan State, 1935-1969* (East Lansing, 1987) pp. 276-77.
[52] Letter of 14 March 1952, Wesley Fishel to MacDonald Salter, Fishel Papers, box 1184, folder 14. The MSA did not approve this proposal. However, the ideas Diệm and Fishel outlined anticipated many of the features of the extensive technical assistance program that Michigan State set up in Vietnam under Fishel's direction in 1955.
[53] Other Americans present at the lunch meeting included: Bill Costello, a reporter for CBS news; Ray Newton, an official of the American Friends Service Committee; Edmund S. Gullion of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff, who had met Diệm during his earlier stint as Chargé D'Affaires at the US Mission in Saigon; and Gene Gregory, who had also served in Saigon and had arranged the first meeting between Douglas and Diệm in the US. The luncheon was also attended by Hoàng Văn Đoàn, bishop of Bắc Ninh in northern Vietnam. Author interview with Gene Gregory, Ho Chi Minh City, March 2002; Letter, Douglas to Diệm, 8 May 1953, William O. Douglas Papers, Box 1716.
[54] Memorandum of Conversation, Edmund S. Gullion, 8 May 1953, *FRUS 1952-1954*, vol. 13, *Indochina*. pp. 553-554.
[55] Don Oberdorfer interview with Mike Mansfield, 28 August 1998. I am grateful to Mr. Oberdorfer for permission to use this quotation here.
[56] Memorandum of Conversation, Edmund S. Gullion, 8 May 1953, *FRUS 1952-1954*, vol. 13, *Indochina*. pp. 553-554.
[57] Guy LaChambre, French Minister to the Associated States of Indochina, declared in June 1954 that "Diem's high moral character and personal integrity do not compensate for an almost total lack of professional competence and administrative experience." (cited in Telegram, Cameron to Dulles, 5 June 1954, Box ?, RG 59, USNA2.) US Ambassador to France Douglas Dillion earlier described Diệm as not unlike "a mystic who has just emerged from a religious retreat into the cold world" and declared that "we are prepared to accept the seemingly ridiculous propsect that this Yogi-like mystic could assume the charge he is apparently about to undertake only because the standard set by his predecessors is so low." (Telegram, Dillion to State, 24 May 1954, printed in *FRUS, 1952-1954*, vol. 13, pp. 1608-1609.)
[58] As noted above, Khôi's participation in these intrigues came to an abrupt end in 1945, when he was executed by Việt Minh agents in the wake of the August Revolution.
[59] "Curriculum Vitae of Mr. Ngo Dinh Nhu," undated, Box 2, John Donnell collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University. Nhu seems to have retained his job at the National Library during the period in which Hanoi was under the control of the Việt Minh; see "Lịch-sử đầy đủ về gia-đình cụ Ngô-Đ.-Diệm [A historical sketch of Ngo Dinh Diem's family]." *Saigon Mới*. 23 Jun 1954 pp. 1, 3.
[60] One of Nhu's associates later recalled accompanying him on a visit undertaken on Diệm's behalf to a Catholic region near the Laos border in 1946. Interview with Trần Kim Tuyến, cited in A.J. Langguth, *Our Vietnam: The War, 1954-1975* (New York, 2000), p. 87.
[61] Author interview with Gene Gregory, Ho Chi Minh City, March 2002.
[62] Emmanuel Mounier, *Personalism* [Philip Mairet, trans.] (London, 1952), pp. 17-19.
[63] *Ibid.*, pp. 103-105.
[64] Mounier was not the only philosopher of Personalism in France. His friend Jacques Maritain explored many of the same ideas; see Jacques Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good* [John J. Fitzgerald, trans.], (New York, 1947). The French Personalism of Mounier and Maritain should be distinguished from American Personalism, which flourished in Boston in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century under the leadership of Borden Parker Bowne and his students. Although both French and American Personalism drew inspiration from Roman Catholic theology, American Personalists tended to be more staunchly idealist than their French counterparts, who acknowledged the independent existence of material reality even as they argued it should not be over-emphasized. See "Personalism", Paul Edwards, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, v. 6 (New York, 1967), pp. 106-109; also "Personalism", Robert Audi, ed., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 575.
[65] The single best example of Diệm's early embrace of Personalist concepts is his statement of 16 June 1949, cited above, in which he invokes notions such as "human dignity" (phẩm cách) and the "truly free person" (con người tự do thực sự).
[66] Ngô Đình Nhu, "Sự góp cức của người Công-giáo vào hòa-bình ở Việt-Nam [The contribution of Catholics to peace in Vietnam]" (Speech delivered on 18 April 1952 at Dalat Military Academy). Reprinted in *Xã Hội* Magazine (Feb 1953 issue) pp. 5, 14, 18-22.
[67] *Ibid.*, p. 21.
[68] "Curriculum vitae of Mr. Ngo Dinh Nhu".
[69] The syndicalist inclinations of the Can Lao party and its founder were later explicitly declared by party officials: "The program of the Can Lao Nhan Vi follows syndicalist lines, advocating co-management of national industries by representatives of capital and labor and workers' participation in the profits and technical development of industries. The party has taken a strong position of support for agrarian reform for the same reason, namely that possession is a right of the worker." *Times of Vietnam Weekly*, 25 February 1956, p. 9.
[70] Edmund S. Wehrle, "'No more pressing task that organization in Southeast Asia': The AFL-CIO approaches the Vietnam War, 1947-1964." *Labor History* v. 42, n. 3 (August 2001) pp. 277-295; *Times of Vietnam Magazine* v. 4, n. 9 (4 Mar 1962) pp. 18-19. Significantly, the Confederation's Vietnamese name (*Tổng Liên Đoàn Lao Động Việt Nam*) did not indicate the group's Christian affiliation; this undoubtedly reflected Bửu's determination to attract non-Christian workers as well as Christians, and also his own identity as a Buddhist.
[71] "Tổng Liên-Đoàn Lao-Động V.N. [The Vietnamese General Federation of Labor]." *Xã Hội*. Feb 1953, pp. 31, 34; "Bản kiến-nghị của Liên-Hiệp nghiệp đoàn Trung-Việt gởi Tổng-Liên Đoàn Lao Động V.N. [Motion of the Federation of Trade Unions of Central Vietnam sent to the General Federation of Vietnamese Labor]." *Xã Hội*. Jul 1953, pp. 16.
[72] Dân Sinh, "Tìm hiểu tổ-chức hợp-tác-xã [Understanding cooperatives]." *Xã Hội*. 15 Sep 1953, pp. 23; Dân Sinh, "Mục-đích và Phương-pháp huấn-luyện [goals and methods of training (for cooperatives)]." *Xã Hội*. 10 Nov 1953, pp. 33-34; Dân Sinh, "Màu sắc tổ-chức hợp-tác-xã các nước [Organization of cooperatives in various countries]." *Xã Hội*. 10 Nov 1953, pp. 28-29.
[73] A detailed account of the Unity Congress is contained in Telegram, Kidder to Dep State, 22 Sep 1953, US State Department Decimal File 751G.00/9-2253, RG 59, USNA2. For published accounts, see *Tiếng Dội*, 8 September 1953, pp. 1, 4; *Le Monde*, 8 September 1953; Donald Lancaster, *The Emancipation of French Indochina* (London, 1961) pp. 275-277. Bảo Đại did not mention the September conference in his memoirs, but he did acknowledge rebuffing a request for a Congress made by Nhu and other intellectuals during the summer of 1953. Bảo Đại, *Le Dragon D'Annam*, pp. 312-13.
[74] For details on the Congress proceedings, see *Vietnam Presse*, 12-17 October 1953 (issues no. 31-36). See also *Le Monde*, 17-20 October 1953.

[75] See for example, Diệm's letter published in *Le Monde*, issue of 25-26 October 1953, p. 3.
[76] Telegram, Dillion to Dulles, 14 October 1953, US State Department Decimal file 751G.00/10-1453, RG 59, USNA2.
[77] The circumstances of the second meeting were reported in *Vietnam Presse*, 27 October 1953, issue no. 45. Bảo Đại's query about Diệm's willingness to serve was reported to US officials by a member of the imperial entourage; see Telegram, Dillion to Dulles, 28 October 1953, US State Department Decimal File 751G.00/10-2853, RG 59, USNA2.
[78] The Unity Congress of September and the National Congress of October were discussed in some of the early accounts of the First Indochina War produced by journalists in the 1950s and 1960s. See, for example, Hammer, *Struggle for Indochina*, p. 305 and Lancaster, *Emancipation of French Indochina*, pp. 275-78. More recent accounts have tended to not to mention these events, however. And I have yet to find any mention of the meetings between Diệm and Bảo Đại on 12 and 26 October in any history of the period, even though they were noted at the time by US diplomats in France and by the French media (*Le Monde*, 28 Oct 1953, p. 2).
[79] Early formulations of this theory are found in Georges Chaffard, *Indochine: Dix Ans D'Independance* (Paris, 1964) pp. 19-20, 26-29; and in Robert Scheer, *How the United States got involved in Vietnam*, (Santa Barbara, 1965) pp. 13-15. Allegations of US influence also appear in Marilyn Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990* (New York, 1991), p. 44; Kahin, *Intervention*, p. 78; and Jacobs, "'Sink or Swim with Ngo Dinh Diem'", pp. 100-116.
[80] Anderson, *Trapped by Success: The Eisenhower Administration and Vietnam, 1953-1961* (New York, 1991) pp. 41-64, especially pp. 52-55.
[81] Bao Đại, *Le Dragon D'Annam*, p. 329. "Tam" refers to Nguyễn Văn Tâm, who served as SVN premier until December 1953 and who was despised by many nationalist groups for his Francophile attitude. "Buu-Loc" was Prince Bửu Lộc, a member of the imperial clan and a staunch Bảo Đại loyalist; he succeeded Tâm as SVN premier and held the post until he was replaced by Diệm.
[82] "Lansdale Team's report on Covert Saigon Mission in 1954 and 1955", printed in *The Pentagon Papers* (Senator Gravel edition, Boston, 1971), v. 1, pp. 573-583. See also Edward Lansdale, *In the Midst of Wars: an American's Mission to Southeast Asia* (New York, 1972).
[83] Declassified US documents demonstrate that these divide-and-conquer intrigues were initiated and directed by the palace rather than by the Americans. See for example, "Vietnamese Government plans for action in South Vietnam," 30 December 1954, Folder 87, Box 5, Central Intelligence Agency Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.
[84] Initially, the regime used "National Revolution" relatively narrowly, as a way to specify the proposed overhaul of the SVN government bureaucracy that Diệm proposed to undertake. (*Saigon Mới*, 18 June 1954, pp. 1,4.) By 1955, however, the regime was using the term more generally to refer to virtually all aspects of Diệm's program. See, for example, the inaugural issue of the government's official newspaper, *Cách Mạng Quốc Gia*, 16 July 1955, p. 1.
[85] This point may need to be qualified with respect to SVN civil servants. The Vietnamese who worked in the SVN bureaucracy may have remembered Decoux with some fondness, because it was he who had pushed for Indochinese to be allowed to serve in some upper level posts that had previously been reserved for Europeans. He had also decreed that the pejorative term *indigène* should be replaced by *Indochinois*. That Diệm and Nhu placed a high priority on securing the cooperation of civil servants was reflected in the creation of the "National Revolutionary Civil Servants Union" in 1955; see *Cách Mạng Quốc Gia*, issues of 16 July 1955 (pp. 3-4) and 2 September 1955 (p. 4).
[86] Eric T. Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe and Indochina, 1940-1944* (Stanford, 2001), especially pp. 130-198.