

# Viet Policy Depressed Kennedy, Adviser Says

## Was Perplexed by Conflicting Reports and Shaken by Coup, Schlesinger's Book Notes

WASHINGTON (AP) — Historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. writes that President John F. Kennedy undoubtedly came to realize in 1963 that Vietnam was "his great failure in foreign policy."

On the other hand, Schlesinger describes Mr. Kennedy's handling of the Cuban missile crisis as a dazzling combination "of toughness and restraint, of will, nerve and wisdom." This responsible use of power, he says, could become "a turning point in the history of the relations between East and West."

Recalling that he saw the President shortly after he heard that South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, had been murdered, Schlesinger writes, "He was somber and shaken. I had not seen him so depressed since the Bay of Pigs. No doubt he realized that Vietnam was his great failure in foreign policy, and that he had never really given it his full attention."

Pulitzer prize winner Schlesinger, who was a White House adviser and sort of intellectual-in-residence in the Kennedy administration, has written a book entitled "A Thousand Days." This account of Mr. Kennedy's brief years in the White House is dramatic with the sweep of great events and vivid in small, personal detail.

### Conflicting Reports

Schlesinger pictures Mr. Kennedy as a man perplexed by conflicting reports about "the mess" in Vietnam.

Was Diem a self-less leader and just the man to unite his people and win the war, or was he an Orien-

tal despot lacking popular support, contemptuous of democracy and the West?

In September, 1963, Mr. Kennedy sent yet another mission to seek out the truth of the situation.

"It consisted this time," Schlesinger writes, "not of the usual senior officials, but of two old Vietnam hands, Gen. Victor Krulak of the marines and Joseph Mendenhall of (the Department of) State, a Foreign Service officer (FSO)."

"After a frenzied weekend of inspection and interrogation, the two men flew back to Washington. Mecklin (John Mecklin of the U.S. In-

formation Agency), who came back with them, observed with the "general and the FSO not only appeared to dislike each other, but also disagreed on what should be done about Vietnam. On the whole flight they spoke to each other only when it was unavoidable."

"They reported immediately to the National Security Council. Krulak told the assembled dignitaries the war was going beautifully, that the regime was beloved by the people and that we need have no undue concern even about Nhu.

"Mendenhall told them that South Vietnam was in a desperate state, that the regime was on the edge of collapse and that Nhu had to go.

### Persuasion by Lodge

"The President listened politely and finally said, 'Were you two gentlemen in the same country?'"

Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, whom Schlesinger portrays as a strong personality with a patrician's sense of fair play and a patriot's pride, tried to persuade Diem to exile Nhu and start some reforms. At length Diem indicated he would think this over but it was too late, the book says, adding:

"The next day the generals struck. Diem and Nhu were murdered, and the history of Vietnam entered a new phase . . ."

### One Scene Missing

Though the Schlesinger book tells many a backstage episode, readers will look in vain for the bedroom scene described in one of the portions serialized in Life magazine.

Telling of Mr. Kennedy's emotional state after the failure at the Bay of Pigs, Schlesinger wrote in the magazine version:

"The only times Jackie had seen him weep were in the hospital at moments of sheer discouragement over his back; tears would fill his

eyes and roll down his cheeks. Now in the bedroom, he put his head into his hands and almost sobbed, and then took her in his arms."

There was some criticism that perhaps this was delving a bit far into a domestic scene. Asked why he deleted it from his book, Schlesinger declined comment. Friends explained, however, that he had come to believe it was not well written; that maybe it was "a bit sob-sisterish."

#### 'Clarification' Added

Added to the book is a "clarification" which did not appear in the magazine. The magazine article said that after Mr. Kennedy tapped Lyndon B. Johnson for Vice President in 1960 and the latter accepted, amid scenes of confusion in convention hotel rooms, Robert F. Kennedy said:

"My God, this wouldn't have happened except that we were all too tired last night."

The inserted language says Robert Kennedy was "referring not to the candidate (Johnson) but to the confusion."

Schlesinger takes some swipes at Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara. He does not come right out and call McNamara a human computer, as some other critics have done, but describes him as a man with a "susceptibility to quantification."

In explaining that Pres-

ident Kennedy lacked time to focus sufficiently on Southeast Asia problems, Schlesinger writes:

"His confidence in McNamara, as wholly justified in so many areas, led the President to go along with the optimists on Vietnam." *end*