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Post Daily Magazine

FACING THE BRINK 6. The Fall of Diem

By CHARLES BARTLETT and EDWARD WEINTAL

THE COUP AGAINST the Diem family THE COUP AGAINST the Dem Iamily arose from exapperation within their own country at the high-handedness and ruthlessness of mandarin rule. One of the most knowledgeable and respected observers of Vietnamese affairs, P. J. Honey of the University of London, holds that Diem BOOK DIGEST

ot South Vietnam's new independent intended to establish an authoritarian regime which would tolerate no political dissent.

dissent. Honey argues that the U. S. should have used the leverage of its aid at that point to insist upon liberalizing policies and a genuine move toward democracy. But the State Dept, and particularly Walter Robertson, then Assistant Secre-ary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, was deferring in those days to the wis-om of the mandariths who ruled For-loss and South Korea, as well as South Vietnam.

om of the mandarins who ruled For-ussa and South Korea, as well as South Jetnam. Political expediency dictated a course of permitting Diem to follow his own thesis that democracy could not be im-posed from the top upon his emerging nation. "Why try to humilate and de-lame us," Diem asked his critics, "while year are fighting a terrible war for our gurvival and for the defense of a vital border of the free world?" The weakness of the Diem thesis was revealed in May, 1963, by the pro-longed and troublesome Buddhist re-actiont to a Diem government order barrieg the public display of religious flags. The prolestors took to the streets and their demonstrations intensified the dispute that had already begun in Wash-ngton over Diem's political wisdom. The State Dept was now in the hands of New Frontiersmen who maintained that the developing world must grow from the same foundations of personal freedom which sustain the developed world, at least in the West. This viewpoint was argued most yooilerously by three officials: Averell

world, at least in the West. This viewpoint was argued most vocierously by three officials: Averell Hartiman, a flinty veteran of public life who then directed Far Eastern Af-fairs and whose capacity to listen when the scemed to be dozing had earned him the inkiname of "the crocodile": Roger West Point who had fought guerrillas in Burma, became an academic specialist on Asla and was director of the State Depti's Bureau of Intelligence at the brilliant son of the first Secretary of Defense, who had fa a New York law firm to join the White House staft as lialson between the President and Harri-man, an old family friend. "You will be my ambassador to Averell," Presi-dent Kennedy tola Forestal. These three men, especially Harriman, hegan in 1962 to press their fears, that the apparent military progress in ro-surgent Communist guerrillas was being undernined by the people's lack of sen-timent for the Dien government.

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THE BUDDHISTS WERE RESPOND. ing to extremists and the dissents from this leadership by more stable fig-

NGO DINH NHU Could be be trusted?

ures were little noted in the rush of at-tention and headlines to the drama stirred by the activists. Later, as Americans came to know the characters in the Buddhist movement better, they recog-nized that the zealous monks were pursuing political power in a crafty, ruth

less way. But Diem and it's brother Nhu had given enough cause for grievance to al-low the protests in the summer of 1963 to assume an air of legitimacy. They were avidly reported by a small group of young American newspapermen who had been totelly disenchanted by the autocratic ways of the Diem regime. The publicity-minded Buddhists would

The publicity-minded Buddhists would notify these reporters to be in a certain place at a certain time and there au-other immolation would occur to stir fresh indignation around the world. The raids on Buddhist pagodas late in August brought the emotionalism in Washington to a new peak. There were emergency meetings and the State Dept. issued a strong statement charging the South Vietnamese government with vio-lating its own assurances that it was South Vietnamese government with vio-lating its own assumances that it was pursuing a policy of reconciliation with the Buddhists. The Nhus had clearly acted to present new <u>Ambissador Henry Cabol</u> Lodge on his artival with in accomplished sup-

strategy was altibuled to Diem's strategy was altibuled to Diem's younger brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, who had become explicitered by the pressures from Washington. Some 100 press, students and Boy Scouls were reported to may been killed in the attack and 1000 Endablists were still to be under arrest. pression of the insurgent monks, strategy was attributed to I The

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THE U. S. COVERNMENT'S OUT-look was glum on Saturday morneng. Aug. 24, 1963, when Harriman, Hilsman and Forrestal sat down to draft a fresh and Forresial set down to trait a tresh cable of <u>instructions</u>. To <u>Lodge</u>, <u>He</u> had requested orders on how to respond to some high Vietnamese generals who sought out <u>Americans</u> after the raids to say they were not responsible and to <u>ware <u>mark</u> where not responsible and to ware <u>mark</u> to <u>raids</u> to <u>foll</u> them all and to make a deal with the Communistry.</u>

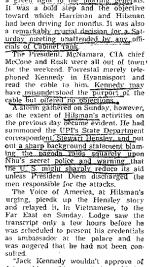
They seemed to want to know how

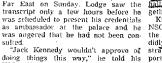
Washington would react to a coup-similar pross in the past had been flatly discouraged by American officials. But the long and disturbing scouragene of events had drained the last of Harri-man's and Elisonal's netience. On that day, Aog. 24, they sent Lodge an historic cable with the instructions. To not about "

This meant that Lodge would dish This meant that Lodge would dish a green light to the plotting generals. It was a bold step and the objective toward which Harriman and Hilsman

doing blings this way," he told his USIA aide, John Mecklin, "This certainly isn't his way of running a government." By Monday, John Kennedy's Adminis-

tration had, as he phrased it, "tailen apart" over the cable. It had ignited the simmering split in the government Me-Nandara, McCone and Taylor were furt-







AVERELL HARRIMAN A cable to Lodge.

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ous. Kennedy quickly summoned a meet-ing of his key advisers. The agitation at the meeting was compounded with surprise that nothing had happened in Saigon. The Juse had been lift-why hadn't the bomb ex-ploided? The lact was that Lodge, hav-ing received his instructions, asked aides to take soundings among seven Vietnamese generals who had exhibited enthusiasm for a coup. The reports came back that the gen

The reports came back that the get-erals were wary and reluctant to move. They had been discouraged for so long from taking any step that might disrupt the conduct of the war against the Viet Cong that they found it hard to believe

the conduct of the war against the Viet Cong that they found it hard to believe that they found it hard to believe The generals' mood, conveyed to Washington by Lodge in a cable which arrived on Wednesday, Aug. 28, stimu-lated proposals to reverse the instruc-tions of Aug. 24. He said, "Ti's not too late-we can still back out." Kennedy was plainly tempted. But he recognized that if he withdrew his readings to be that if he withdrew his readings to be a last resort against Diem's obduracy. The renerals, Who intell very prove to be a last resort against Diem's obduracy. The tense meetings in Washington dragged on through the week without any further decision by the President. He went away on Friday to Hyannis-port and at a Saturday meeting Scre-tary Rusk, who had so far taken no sfrong position on the issue, called with a slight flourish for an opinion front Vice President Johnson. "I don't believed in this toak and dagger stuff," The Vice President orawized. "The wer should uty to in we with what we've got." To Johnson's Cfolf, the never brought president orawized. "Think we should up this judgment publicly in compaint against the mess which fell upon him

To Solitsons erceit, he never brolign up this judgment publicly in compaint against the mess which fell upon him alter both Diem and Kennedy had been killed. Harriman Hilsman and Forrestal lost their Influence Water Jonsson Speame rresident, but he did not continue to

President, but he did not continue to argue the hoot point as to who was right ar tais crucial turning point. (Harriman later regained his status, By the end of 1966, Johnson was saying that if Harriman were 10 years younger he would make him Secretary of State. 4 4

TO ASSIST HIS VIEW OF THE SITUA-tion, Kennedy dispatched several ob-servers to Vietnam. Marine Gen. Vietog H. Krulak, of the counter-insurgency, task force: Bullis Phillips an experi-enced AID man, and John A. Menden-nall an old Vietnam hand, went out to-gether. gether.

gether. Krulak returned to report at a small. NSC meeting in the Cabinet room that the military effort was proceeding splem-dialy with no damage from the demony-strations. Phillips and Mendenhalt ra-ported that the political dissent threat-ened to unravel the whole effort against the Communists. "Have you threa hear to the come

ened to unravel the whole effort against the Communists. <u>"Have you, three been to the sama</u> <u>place?" Keingdy asked Intredutously</u> on Sept 24, he sent Robert McNamarg to learn what was going on. When the Secretary reappeared in the Cabinet room on Oct, 2, he had completely re-versed his espousal of the Pentagon modium position

He said he found that there were position. He said he found that there were serious political problems and that the war against the Communists could not succeed unless they were resolved. The denouement was inevitable from that point Lodge took no pains to hido his distate for the Dien family, and to Nhu's ClA-trained special forces was cuit on Oct. 19, and kennedy fistured Lodge to control the situation as long as the could but not to block the coup when it developed. Diem was forcen hido a right posture and the made he concili-atory moves until no met with Lodge on Non-L

"Tell me what you want me to do and I will do it," Diem said, "It you don't know what you want me to do, cable Washington for instructions and then tell me. I will do whatever you want me to do."

me to do." The provid old man's capitulation had come too late and there was little that Lodgo could say Wilhin 24 hours the palace foil to the generals and Diem and US brother bad been stain.

Tomorrow:

Dean Rusk From "Facing the Brink." Cosyright & 1932 by Charles L. Barbelt and Edward Weintal, Reprolled by permission of Charles Scribner's Sous.

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