

This is mostly what Mrs. not JFK, said

BOOKS AND ARTS

No turning back

FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1961-1963: VOLUME III, VIETNAM, JANUARY-AUGUST 1963; VOLUME IV, VIETNAM, AUGUST-DECEMBER 1963. Edited by John Glennon and others. Department of State Publications through the Government Printing Office, Washington, DC; 706 pages and 793 pages; \$27 (\$30 foreign post paid) and \$30 (\$37.50)

DID President Kennedy—as Oliver Stone contends in his controversial film “JFK”—plan to get out of Vietnam at an early date? This superb new two-volume documentary collection makes the answer clear; and it is no.

The documents involved, long classified, come from the John F. Kennedy Library, the State Department, the National Security Council, the Defence Department (including records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and of Robert McNamara, then defence secretary) and the Central Intelligence Agency. A small number of required deletions are carefully noted in the text. The editors, the preface states, “are confident that they have had complete access to all presidential written records bearing on Vietnam”.

What those show, in detail, is how Kennedy and his top aides, increasingly vexed and frustrated, struggled with a steadily deteriorating political and military situation. Despite its optimistic pronouncements, the administration was often both poorly informed and drifting. The dispatch of the Green Berets as a counter-insurgency force was largely a public-relations exercise.

America’s problems reached a climax on November 1st 1963 when its protégé in South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem, was overthrown and murdered by the South Vietnamese army. This shocked Kennedy, yet five days later he wrote to Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge in Saigon that “Your own

leadership in pulling together and directing the whole American operation in South Vietnam in recent months has been of greatest importance, and you should know that this achievement is recognised here throughout the government.”

All through that difficult year, there is no evidence whatever of an “independent” CIA policy, at odds with the president’s, that might have served as the basis for an assassina-

tion conspiracy. Both before and after the coup, the president had no discernible plans for a substantial withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam, then estimated at about 16,000. To be sure, on October 11th 1963 he signed a memorandum declaring that “no formal announcement should be made of the implementation of plans to withdraw 1,000 us military personnel by



JFK with Green Beret

the end of 1963.” But that, as the record shows, was as far as the president was prepared to go.

If Kennedy was in the process of changing his mind about Vietnam, the State Department volumes contain no indication of it. On the contrary, on October 23rd, for instance, he sent this message to Diem on the occasion of the National Holiday of Vietnam:

I wish once again to express the admiration

of the American people for the unfailing courage of the South Vietnamese people in their valiant struggle against the continuing efforts of communism to undermine and destroy Vietnamese independence. The United States of America has confidence in the future of the Republic of Vietnam, in its ability both to overcome the present communist threat to their independence, and to determine their own destiny.

After the anti-Diem coup, James Reston and the *New York Times* continued to press for negotiations with North Vietnam that would lead to the unification and neutralisation of the whole country. In public and private, senior State and White House officials rejected such suggestions, basing themselves specifically on the president’s own words.

Foreign critics of America’s policy received the same treatment. On November 5th, Charles Bohlen, the American ambassador in Paris, told a hostile President De Gaulle “that we would have been perfectly willing to live with a divided Vietnam but that the communists were the ones who had started the current war and that it was either a question of helping Vietnam resist these attacks or letting the entire country go communist.” De Gaulle was unpersuaded.

On November 13th Michael Forrestal, then a senior member of the National Security Council staff, gave the same line to the *New York Times*, which had not ceased to run nettlesome news stories and editorial comments. Forrestal told Robert Kleiman that “it would be folly... at the present time” to pursue “a negotiated settlement... between North and South Vietnam”. Responsible South Vietnamese “would view the prospects of a new Geneva Conference as... a complete sell-out by the us.” “I referred”, Forrestal concluded, “to the president’s statements indicating that the us was prepared to withdraw its presence from South Vietnam as soon as Hanoi

ceased its interference in the South or as soon as the South was able to handle the problem on its own.”

The following day Kennedy himself restated American policy at a White House press conference:

Now, that is our object, to bring Americans home, permit the South Vietnamese to maintain themselves as a free and independent country, and permit democratic forces within the country to operate—which they can, of

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course, much more freely when the assault from the inside, and which is manipulated from the north, is ended.

A few days later, Kennedy embarked on his fatal trip to Dallas. And Vietnam became Lyndon Johnson's war.

The new Europe War footing

INSIDE THE NEW EUROPE. By Axel Krause. HarperCollins/Bessie Books; 356 pages; \$25

A CRAFTSMAN-JOURNALIST in the best American tradition, Axel Krause has amassed thousands of interviews in 30 years in Europe, hoarding them like skeins of thread that might one day be worked into a grand tapestry. The result is a survey of the development of the European Community that sweeps from Charlemagne to the eve of its recent summit in Maastricht.

Image piles upon image. When you put this book down, you will have marched into diplomatic action with EC zealots, lobbied with its lobbyists, jeered with its doubters, oohed at Margaret Thatcher's attack on the Community at Bruges, aahed at the speech of Jacques Delors that provoked her, met the mafia gearing up for the great 1992 market, and schemed with American and Japanese leaders about how best to cope with the whole phenomenon. You will know the new Western Europe as never before. But you will be hard put to understand it.

Mr Krause, who had to flee Hitler's Europe as a boy, is an American with a direct feel for what drove the Community's founders. He understands that Europe is a cause to be fought for and an image to be built. A nice vignette shows Jacques Delors in 1989, determined not to go to Washington unless received there by President Bush with the full pomp due to a head of state, which he is not. Mr Bush neatly sidesteps this protocol minefield. He casually tells an off-guard Mr Delors that he is looking forward to having him for lunch at the White House on June 15th, so "see you in Washington in the middle of next month."

In one big respect, Mr Krause's enthusiasm for the cause goes overboard. His opening interview is with a young Dutch engineer at Philips, an electronics company struggling to match Japanese competitors in making television sets. Describing how tough it will be to succeed, the man says that "what we desperately need is European leadership." Mr Krause is impressed by this. He thinks Europe's industrial malaise is so deep that it will take more than mere management strategy to end it.

The long trauma of Philips is woven through the book as one Euro-visionary

chief executive succeeds another. Cornelius van der Klugt tells Mr Krause openly that what he expects from Europe's leaders is public money and protection. Today things are looking up at Philips, not because of such succour, but because the company has been forced to shape up—in other words because of management strategy. Mr Krause does not mention this.

His book is imbued with the idea that trade is warfare by other means. When British advertising agencies plant their flag on Madison Avenue, this symbolises new European dynamism. When the Japanese invest heavily in European manufacturing, this symbolises Europe in peril. Mr Krause provides much evidence that big business is irredeemably government-ridden—his tales of Airbus, Spanish supertrains, and ATEX's investments in Europe are eye-opening. But it becomes cumulatively frustrating that such an experienced business journalist will not draw conclusions from his own tales.

Is it only a paradox that Sumitomo from Japan has done wonders for a grimy tyre factory that it bought in France? What sadly became of that great British expeditionary force to Madison Avenue? Didn't the senior commission figure who called Carlo de Benedetti's ill-fated bid for Société Générale de Belgique "a day for Europe" make a mug of himself? What is Mr Krause's honest verdict on "Eureka"—the research programme that was launched as Europe's answer to star wars?

As Southey wrote of the other, real, sort of warfare:

"But what good came of it at last?"
Quoth little Peterkin.
"Why that I cannot tell," said he,
"But 'twas a famous victory."

Myanmar

A woman of subtlety

FREEDOM FROM FEAR. By Aung San Suu Kyi. Viking; 338 pages; £14.99. Penguin; \$6.99

IN HIS foreword to this book, Vaclav Havel says Aung San Suu Kyi is an example of the power of the powerless. It is a nice phrase, but not wholly true. Miss Suu Kyi is not like the dissidents, Mr Havel among them, who persistently irritated the masters of the former Soviet empire but were not considered a real threat to them. She has actual power, and is feared by the soldiers who run Myanmar, the name they have given to Burma. She is the legally elected ruler of the country. Her party won overwhelmingly in the 1990 general election that the soldiers, to their subsequent regret, allowed to take



Suu Kyi won't leave

place and the results of which they have refused to honour.

In December the junta claimed that Miss Suu Kyi had been expelled from her party. Few Burmese accept this, and assume it is another sign of the junta's nervousness. Miss Suu Kyi's presence in Myanmar is a nagging reminder that democracy's time will come again, even in a country where it has been suppressed since 1962. Some in the regime, for whom the gun is the solution for difficult problems, would like to kill her. But Miss Suu Kyi is a soldier's daughter, which gives her a special status. And the protection the outside world seeks to provide her with, such as the award of the Nobel peace prize, is not without value. So the regime pleads with her to leave the country. Surely you would like to see your husband again, at Harvard?

Miss Suu Kyi declines, even though she is confined to her house. She does not want to become just another political exile. That would be very ordinary, and she is far from that. One of the most interesting essays in her book is an honest account of her father, Aung San. When the second world war broke out in Europe, Aung San, a politician with a following among students, was wooed by the Japanese. When Japan invaded Burma in 1941, he was a general in an "independence army" that marched "with great pride and joy" alongside the Japanese troops. In 1943 he was decorated by the Japanese emperor in Tokyo. In 1945, when it was clear that the Japanese were going to lose, he sided with the British. In 1947, when Burma was close to independence and Aung San was on its Executive Council, he was assassinated.

Not perhaps a conventional hero in western eyes. Miss Suu Kyi, too, is more subtle than she seems. A good reason for reading this book is to try to understand the woman who is likely, eventually, to run this beautiful, benighted country.