

aggressor. And the UPI dispatch which carried this quotation reported that the Dutch Government feels bitterly disappointed at the strong-arm activities of the United States, which accomplished the humiliation of one of its staunchest allies in the world context with militant communism. Also, how many believe that, after Sukarno has administered West New Guinea for seven years, the promised U.N. plebiscite will bring independence to the Papuan natives, even assuming they still will have the courage to vote for it?

### KENNEDY'S FORESIGHT AT AP BAC January 7, 1963

There is a special reason why the lack of will to fight for their own independence that the Vietnamese troops displayed at the battle of Ap Bac a few days ago merits fundamental Administration review of its current policy of military aid in South Vietnam. That special reason is found in a citation of conditions in which such a policy is "doomed to failure" that President Kennedy made April 6, 1954, to the Senate of which he then was a member.

"I am frankly of the belief," he said, "that no amount of American military assistance in Indochina (South Vietnam is now a separate state therein) can conquer an enemy which is everywhere, and at the same time, nowhere, an enemy of the people which has the sympathy and covert support of the people."

Mr. Kennedy believed then, as did former Representative Judd of Minnesota (whom he approvingly quoted), that "only for such a cause as their own freedom" would the Indochinese "make the heroic effort necessary to win this kind of struggle." And the Senator urged France to grant this freedom as a *sine qua non* of this "historic effort."

South Vietnam, as one of the four areas into which Indochina has divided, has enjoyed this freedom in the sense Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Judd used the term in 1954. Its people have rejected for a Western type of semi-dictatorship, the Chinese Communist export type of government that dominates their North Vietnam neighbors and former fellow-countrymen.

But for some years the population, and lately the armed forces, of South Vietnam have failed to show willingness to make the "heroic effort" necessary to maintain their independence against the spread of

Communism in Southeast Asia. And their latest indication of this, at Ap Bac, confronts President Kennedy with the 1954 thesis of Senator Kennedy. It was, specifically, that "no amount of American military assistance" can preserve independence for a people "who are not willing to die for it." And generally the thesis was that U.S. military involvement on the Asian mainland in any degree was a most dubious policy.

At Ap Bac last week, our Jan. 6 dispatch from Saigon reported, "attacking South Vietnamese troops were badly beaten by Communist guerrillas. At several crucial moments during the battle . . . with reinforcements on the way, and the eastern flank open, the Americans pleaded for reinforcements to come in on the east to close a ring around the Vietcong. But Vietnamese, at a high level, disregarded this, refused to take or attack certain positions, reinforced on the west, and gave the (outnumbered) Vietcong an escape route."

These circumstances not only expose our military assistance policy to very serious question, they also strongly suggest the existence in South Vietnam of the very situation that led Senator Kennedy in 1954 to foresee as "doomed to failure" the policy he as President is pursuing in 1963. And among their consequences was the killing, wounding and capture of American members of the armed forces—probably not 375 as the North Vietnamese claim, but more than the 30 casualties our official sources concede.

It will be very difficult for the President to find an alternative to the U.S. policy that has proved ineffectual, and trends to deeper and deeper military involvement in Southeast Asia. This policy is the product of starchy-eyed diplomacy and even more ingenious commitments, all with the congenial weakness which in 1954 Senator Kennedy diagnosed as fatal when it appears.

His Administration took the venture of a sensible alternative to the previous Administration's attempt to make Laos a firmly allied pro-Western nation. No important new threat to our security has resulted. But there would be heavy political and popular resistance to repeat this Laos policy in South Vietnam, because the plausible "domino theory" still is widely accepted in this country. And this, despite the fact that whenever Communist China gets nuclear weapons, most of Southeast Asia will turn its face to Peking.

This venture in South Vietnam, however, may have to be taken by the President. And in more difficult circumstances than he foresaw in 1954, or could have foreseen.