

great pain and death on the peasants. In fact, Diem and Nhu both specifically liked the use of excessive power. They still held to the mandarin psychology of the population's responsibility to obey the government. An example of this mandarin thinking was the theory that the population would so hate the killing and the awesome force of its government that it would automatically respect the government even more, and would turn on the Vietcong. It was an attitude well out of date, for Indochina had been swept by twenty years of revolutionary excitement and fervor unleashed by the Vietminh and Vietcong, who had taught not Communism as the West knew it, but that a host of new possibilities, among them dignity and justice, were open to the peasants.

That attitude of Diem and Nhu was an important reflection of the difference between the way they regarded Communism and the way the society did. The population was simply not that anti-Communist; it resented the force unleashed on it more than it feared the enemy it was allegedly being saved from. By the same token, a few years later the My Lai massacre would become a major political embarrassment to the Thieu government because it reflected the same attitude: in defense of the Saigon government's own existence and in defense of the American anti-Communism, far too much fire power was inflicted on the reluctant Vietnamese people.

If the military lost on jets, it pushed very hard on the other issues. At the beginning it was the only aspect of Vietnam that Kennedy really interested himself in. Vietnam had been a low-priority item in early 1962, but these issues of killing were different, and the President specifically commissioned both Hilsman and Forrestal to watch the military on them, to make sure that nothing slipped by. He was convinced, and rightly so, that the military were always trying to push things by him. And Hilsman and Forrestal found that for the first time McGeorge Bundy was a genuine help on Vietnam, a sign of the President's very real interest. Bundy made sure the door to the President was always open, though often the points seemed small or even technical by the standards of the period; they were not global. Napalm was the first one. Harkins liked napalm, Diem and Nhu liked napalm; Harkins said it put the fear of God in the Vietcong. It was just one more weapon in the arsenal, the general said, and perhaps he was right; other weapons

*The Best of The Brightest, David
Harkins, London House, 1972
(page from Fawcett report)*