

The Selling of Ngo Dinh Diem
1954 - 1961


by

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Abstract

The systematic promotion in the United States of Ngo Dinh Diem's leadership of South Vietnam between 1955 and 1960, a promotion by the Government of South Vietnam, the domestic American Vietnam Lobby and several members of the State Department and Central Intelligence Agency, reflected a coordinated effort to influence Eisenhower administration policy. Principally conducted by the American Friends of Vietnam under the guidance of the public relations firm Oram, promotion of Diem was intended to mobilize both American popular and policy making audiences on behalf of South Vietnam's leadership. Applying sophisticated public relations campaigns focused upon the American media and the foreign policy community, Diem's advocates succeeded in casting him, by 1957, as a popular and successful Asian "miracle man". However, premised upon idealized characterizations of his leadership at odds with South Vietnamese conditions, Diem's promotion amongst increasingly disillusioned American audiences became untenable and ultimately a liability to the continued security of his regime.

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Introduction

Contemporary popular and historical explanations of America's escalating commitment to South Vietnam focus predominantly upon the presidency of Lyndon Johnson in the mid – 1960's. The most important origins of major American involvement in the Vietnam War, however, occurred in the 1950's with the Eisenhower administration's program of Vietnamese nation-building founded upon the leadership of Premier and President Ngo Dinh Diem. Fundamentally revising its 1954 refusal, in the wake of the French collapse, to "make Indo-China a [vital] symbol for all of Southeast Asia", the Eisenhower administration embarked upon a campaign to construct a viable South Vietnamese state by extending significant assistance to a regime whose survival came to be considered essential to American security.¹ This process of ratcheting commitments personalized to Ngo Dinh Diem's government evolved from Diem's ability to position himself as the foremost anti-Communist, anti-colonialist, nationalist leadership candidate in the South, from the Eisenhower administration's own predilection for supporting non-Communist governments internationally, and from an institutionalized promotion of the "Diem solution" by influential interest groups mostly outside of government.

Perceptions among members of the informal Vietnam Lobby that the Eisenhower administration was unwilling to extend sufficient support to Ngo Dinh Diem's regime provided the genesis for establishing the American Friends of Vietnam (AFV). Created in late 1955 with helpful funding from the Central Intelligence Agency, the American Friends of Vietnam undertook to influence American foreign policy objectives to reflect its own conviction that South Vietnam represented a vital national security interest to the United States and that the continued leadership of Ngo Dinh Diem was essential for defending that interest. Accommodating American foreign policy to its own agenda, according to the AFV's Executive, necessitated comprehensive public relations and political lobbying campaigns to systematically shape American perceptions of South Vietnamese politics.

Orchestration of Ngo Dinh Diem's promotion by the American Friends of Vietnam and the Government of South Vietnam was conducted under the guidance of the public relations firm Oram. By carefully constructing characterizations of Diem appropriate to American political culture and by taking full advantage of Americans' limited knowledge of the South, the firm sought to disseminate consistent and reaffirming characterizations of Diem's leadership intended to define public and Congressional understanding of the regime. The AFV's consistent ability to

¹ Richard H. Immerman, John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), p.40.

place their promotional material in American newspapers and magazines reflected Oram's sophisticated understanding of the mass media. Implementing a multifaceted program expertly tuned to the needs and practices of the media, Oram positioned the AFV as a legitimate and authoritative foreign policy organization able to influence perceptions among both popular and elite audiences.

Focusing initially upon the cynicism toward the South Vietnamese government commonly held by members of the foreign policy community and media, the AFV sought to counter characterizations of Diem's leadership as weak, indecisive and uncooperative. Reflecting their own conviction that Diem represented the essential "Third Force" anti-Communist, anti-colonialist nationalist candidate capable of sustaining South Vietnam, the AFV emphasized his personal qualities as a "great man of history" capable of addressing major social, political, economic and military problems. Diem's promotion thus came to identify the South Vietnamese cause as synonymous with his successful leadership. Less than two years after its inception, the American Friends of Vietnam's advocacy of Diem had generated enough awareness and support to prepare the ground for a prestigious American tour by the South Vietnamese leader. Hailed as "one of the great figures of the twentieth Century" at a New York ticker tape parade held in his honor and embraced by the media as an Asian "miracle man", Diem basked in American approval while enjoying crucial official support both politically and financially.

However, beginning in late 1957, the inability of the Diem regime to reconcile the increasingly apparent contrast between its idealized representations and the reality of South Vietnamese politics fostered escalating criticism in the American press and foreign policy community. Also, excessive promotion of Diem's government as an unqualified success came to generate critical, disillusioned coverage of the government in an American media normally reluctant to apply conventional standards of conduct to governments threatened directly by "International Communism." These factors redefined the terms of debate surrounding Diem's leadership, fundamentally challenging the AFV's carefully constructed consensus among American audiences. Moreover, within this environment of escalating criticism of the South Vietnamese government, profound divisions within the South Vietnamese embassy systematically hindered Oram and AFV efforts to defend Diem's leadership from charges of nepotism, corruption, oppression of dissidents, and totalitarian control of Vietnamese society.

The highly successful selling of Diem thus ultimately proved to be a liability given both the South Vietnamese government's unwillingness to reform and emerging divisions within Oram's carefully constructed promotional infrastructure. By the end of the Eisenhower administration, the

inability of Diem's promotional advocates to maintain the idealized stereotypes of his leadership had opened a widening division between Americans and the government of South Vietnam, a division that would culminate in President Kennedy's fateful decision to remove Diem from office in 1963. Oram's spectacular public relations campaign would thus help lead to tragedy for the United States, Vietnam and Diem himself. Though not deterministic, the public promotion of Diem helped to define America's stake in South Vietnam by tying American fortunes to a Vietnamese leader of highly questionable quality. Then, the American removal of Diem would dramatically increase Washington's responsibility for subsequent events in that ill-fated Southeast Asian nation.

American foreign policy towards South Vietnam during the early Eisenhower administration, while giving significant assistance to the maintenance of Diem's anti-Communist government, retained a measure of flexibility short of unconditional commitment. Despite the desire to provide the time necessary to construct a viable, nationalist anti-Communist force in the South capable of resisting Communist encroachment, the administration exhibited a reluctance to forgo its freedom of action in determining appropriate levels of military and economic involvement. This effort to restrain commitments to the South, despite both public and private adherence to the domino theory of Communist expansion, was revealed both in the administration's refusal to unilaterally intervene in support of declining French fortunes in 1953 and in subsequent American qualified endorsement of the Geneva Accords. The creation of the South East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) in September, 1954, further illustrated Eisenhower's and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles' desire to avoid concrete obligations in the region. Extending defensive protocols to South Vietnam and its neighbors, the alliance was conceived by Dulles principally as a "moral offensive." Distinct from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's mechanism for the immediate and necessary response of all members to counter external aggression, SEATO offered instead only the muted promise that each member would "act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional process."² Flexibility within the Eisenhower administration's policy in South Vietnam was also applied towards Diem's administration during the Sect Crisis in mid-1955, as the administration reluctantly approved, then stayed, the removal of Diem from office following a series of pessimistic reports from General J. Lawton Collins. This willingness on the part of the administration to entertain the replacement of Diem was condemned by members of the Vietnam Lobby who consistently maintained that Diem's leadership was essential to the security of the South.

² United States - Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967: Study Prepared by the Department of Defense, book 1., (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971), p.3.

The Vietnam Lobby was also dissatisfied with the Eisenhower administration's initial general lack of emphasis on South Vietnamese issues. Plagued by health problems that limited the vitality of both Eisenhower and Dulles, the administration concentrated its limited energies on Eisenhower's reelection, balancing the budget, civil rights, disarmament, and international crises in Hungary, the Middle East, Taiwan and Lebanon. Compounding this marginalization of the South Vietnamese cause, according to the Vietnam Lobby, was the Eisenhower administration's initial refusal to repudiate the Geneva Accords' provision for Vietnamese national elections in 1956. Diem's avoidance of those elections, due to Ho Chi Minh's extensive popularity, was not immediately supported by American policy. Concerned with the accompanying diplomatic and military obligations associated with endorsing Diem's rejection of the elections, especially if the North sought a military solution, the Eisenhower administration initially applied the less confrontational policy of support for electoral conditions believed to be unacceptable to the North. This refusal to categorically deny the obligation of the South to honor the Geneva Accords, which the United States never officially signed, galvanized early members of the Vietnam Lobby who unanimously agreed that elections would serve only to unite Vietnam under the Communist North. Decrying the administration's policy, the Vietnam Lobby began to persuade members of Congress, the media, and members of the foreign policy elite that "the American people will not allow our government to lend a hand in the execution of a scheme which will enslave ten million people in the name of a democratic right."³

Determined to counter the reluctance of the Eisenhower administration to unconditionally commit to South Vietnam as a vital national interest, the American Friends of Vietnam sought to "make the American people aware of their stake in Vietnam, to make influential groups more familiar with the facts about Vietnam, to help bring about actions which will be of use to Vietnam in the building up of the country. And to do these things with an intensity and a continuity enough to make a marked difference in the way things go."⁴ Embarking upon an ambitious and systematic effort to define the South Vietnamese Government's cause to the American people, the Vietnam Lobby privately recognized that "our influence on American public opinion becomes important largely when it results in an influence on American official action. Our individual deeds may be wasted unless we have enough people operating in a large and effective enough way to weigh down the see-saw (on) our side."⁵ With this objective in mind, the Vietnam Lobby hoped that the successful selling of Diem would encourage the Eisenhower administration to give the Vietnamese leader significant and sustained support.

³ Are We Saving Vietnam?, Oram Papers, Indiana University. Indianapolis Archive, A92-19, 3/7.

⁴ AFV Treasurer Correspondence to Harold Oram, Oram Papers, A90-39, 59/7.

⁵ AFV Treasurer Correspondence to Harold Oram, 15 June 1956, Oram Papers, A90-39, 59/7.

Evaluating the influence of the Diem promotion on American popular opinion and government policy confronts the inevitable problems of determining the significance of a large, rather informal personal network enjoying some covert government assistance. Accomplished subtly behind the scenes, the American Friends of Vietnam's effort to affect official policy typically reflected an emphasis upon information and useful personal relationships. As such, the AFV's role in determining the perceptions of individuals and organizations exposed to its promotional campaign or in motivating converted leaders to support Diem remains largely suggestive due to the elusive privacies of opinion formation and the difficulty in definitively attributing the actions of government leaders to AFV activities. But, despite the inherent problems associated with conclusively establishing the relative influence of lobbying groups on foreign policy, strong evidence exists as to the importance of Diem's promotional advocates in redefining American popular perceptions and resulting foreign policy debate regarding South Vietnam. This in turn probably influenced, and certainly facilitated, the administration's much stronger support for the Diem regime.

Oram's relationship with the American media illustrates the capacity of carefully constructed public relations to shape understanding in an environment largely bereft of alternative sources of information. AFV intervention to influence the content of many publications about Vietnam, supplemented by the organization's consistent ability proactively to define the terms of debate regarding issues such as Diem's importance to industrialization in the South, his effective management of American assistance, and his potential role as a regional opponent of Cold War neutralism, provide strong evidence of the Vietnam Lobby's ability to interject its agenda into the mainstream media. And while Oram's advocacy constructed favourable frames of reference for understanding an unfamiliar cause, the selling of Diem was also adept in responding to critical material which challenged the generally positive consensus.

It should be acknowledged that support for Diem's continued leadership of the South appeared to have proponents within the State Department itself. Tasked with managing official policy towards South Vietnam, senior members of the State Department, including Walter S. Robertson and Kenneth Young, enthusiastically endorsed and cooperated with the American Friends of Vietnam despite the organization's reservations about existing policy. Robertson's and Young's support of the AFV, instrumental in imparting legitimacy and potency to Diem's promotion, reflected the complex relationship the AFV shared with its supporters. The Eisenhower administration's reluctance to commit American resources and prestige to South Vietnam was hardly irrevocable,

and AFV political lobbying and public relations campaigns coincided with a period of relative stability and apparent prosperity in the South, conditions that did not fully test the administration's support for the South Vietnamese. However, despite some commonality between the AFV and the Eisenhower administration, Oram maintained an aggressive promotion of Diem intended to entrench his position within the context of evolving American foreign policies in Southeast Asia. Dissatisfied with Eisenhower's inattention and caution, Oram effectively promoted Diem's leadership with the media and foreign policy community, as the Vietnam Lobby tried to associate support of Diem with vital American national interests. Determined and capable, the American Friends of Vietnam, in cooperation with the South Vietnamese government and some associates within the American government, facilitated a significantly greater involvement by the United States in building a viable new Asian nation under the leadership of Ngo Dinh Diem.

American Political Culture, Propaganda and the Early Vietnam Lobby

The origins of the public promotion of Ngo Dinh Diem lay in the domestic political environment of the early 1950's and in the Eisenhower administration's ideological conception of the nature and appropriate conduct of the Cold War. Dwight D. Eisenhower's electoral victory reflected the popular perception among the American public that the incumbent Democrats had been too "soft on Communism". Adopting a platform vociferous in its opposition to Communist expansion and aggression, Eisenhower and his Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, received a mandate for a more dynamic American foreign policy. Reflecting this commitment, Eisenhower's inaugural speech emphasized America's determination to defend freedom and justice globally under his stewardship, and such promises, supported by the powerful influence of the Republican right wing, encouraged aggressive anti-Communist rhetoric.

Within the administration, the perceived threat of Communism encouraged an emphasis on international propaganda and information programs. Communism's international expansion represented to the American foreign policy community an ideological challenge to provide a viable alternative model for developing nations that were profoundly disenchanted with the colonial West. Appreciation within the administration for the limits of American power, allied with recognition of the consequences of armed conflict with the Soviet Union or its proxies, as in Korea, led the administration to elevate propaganda as an essential instrument of national security and foreign policy. Informational programs aimed at the "hearts and minds" of the Third World were viewed as vehicles for countering the virulent challenge of Communism in a manner unlikely to foster either direct conflict or necessitate American commitment of significant resources. Emphasis upon propaganda activities also provided high profile indications to the domestic right of the administration's global commitment to anti-Communism.

The establishment of the International Information Activities Committee, or Jackson Committee, between January and June, 1953, reflected the administration's view of propaganda as an essential element of national security and foreign policy. By providing the framework for the fundamental restructuring of propaganda activities, the Jackson Committee's influence, would endure for decades.⁶ Of particular concern was the appropriate function and institutionalization of propaganda within the national security and foreign policy structures. The delineation of

⁶ Shawn J. Parry- Giles, "The Eisenhower Administration's Conceptualization of the USIA: The Development of Overt and Covert Propaganda Strategies," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 24 (Spring 1994), p.264.

propaganda as an instrument of national policy in its own right was reflected in the Committee's "claims that the propaganda function, like the military and economic, [is] sufficiently different from diplomacy to warrant separate administration; that propaganda should serve national policy which is made by the member departments of the NSC [National Security Council] rather than the State Department."⁷

The Jackson Committee's support of international informational programs generated several findings which influenced the subsequent environment, resources, and conduct of propaganda activities on behalf of American foreign policy. Lamenting the reputed advantage of Communist totalitarian states to garner wide domestic support for their policies by disseminating information readily and without challenge, the Committee proposed a counter program of coordinated messages from the White House to the American people. The systematic application of the White House as a conduit for informational programs was perceived as providing both domestic and foreign benefits. Domestic solidarity and support for international policies would supposedly be forged due to greater public respect for both the institution of the Presidency and Eisenhower personally than for more traditional policy advocates in the State Department. Calculated inclusion of messages addressed to the American public through White House communications were also conceived as vehicles for influencing international audiences. Information ostensibly intended for domestic audiences would represent a more legitimate and credible source than material focused directly upon foreigners.

Also of particular concern to the Jackson Committee was the belligerent tone adopted by American informational services during the Korean war, a style which undermined the effectiveness and utility of the program. According to Jackson, a shift in program emphasis and content was necessary since "to be effective [propaganda] must be dependable, convincing, and truthful."⁸ However, after insisting upon a less belligerent official program, the Committee was willing to assign more combative and aggressive propaganda activities to private agencies. Central Intelligence Agency covert involvement with private sources, according to Jackson, would permit a forum in which "we can play tricks, we can denounce, we can take chances, we can act fast, all things that an official Governmental propaganda agency cannot do."⁹

In Jackson's view, Eisenhower's commitment to the development of international information programs was premised on the conviction that "psychological warfare should not be

⁷ Parry-Giles, "The Eisenhower Administration's Conceptualization of the USIA," p.265.

⁸ Parry-Giles, "The Eisenhower Administration's Conceptualization of the USIA," p.266.

⁹ Parry-Giles, "The Eisenhower Administration's Conceptualization of the USIA," p.267.

the pet mystery of one or more Departments of the Government, but should be the entire posture of the entire Government to the entire world."¹⁰ Accordingly, the United States Information Agency (USIA) was created on August 1, 1953, as an extension of the National Security Council. Reflecting the influence of the Jackson Committee's recommendations, the USIA's mandate was to disseminate positive and objective news, leaving to private organizations the task of generating more belligerent propaganda. Eisenhower directed that "clandestine arrangements" be made with publications internationally, along with a program to employ "private American organizations" to further official foreign policy objectives.¹¹

Beginning in the mid- 1950's, the Central Intelligence Agency embarked upon an aggressive program to establish appropriate conduits for disseminating propaganda. Informal associations were sponsored between the American intelligence community and members of the American media based upon a perceived commonality of purpose imparted by the Cold War, as agents were placed in established and reputable news organizations, including ABC News, Newsweek, Life, the Associated Press and United Press International.¹² Agency briefings and debriefings of journalists and editors warranted the placement of an agency liaison in New York, and prominent domestic publishing houses were included within the CIA's information program. Franklin Books, Charles Scribner's Sons, G.P. Putnam's Sons and Ballantine Books either carried agency produced works or received financial assistance from the American intelligence community. And, finally, influence over the coverage of international publications was applied by the Central Intelligence Agency through the ownership or subsidy of foreign, particularly English language newspapers. Maintaining an influence over "at least one newspaper in every foreign capital at any given time", the agency targeted existing news sources for their legitimacy and ability to obscure American ownership.¹³ The CIA's international manipulation of its foreign English language newspapers fostered a conduit for disseminating propaganda and misinformation material back amongst American audiences. For example, its covert relationship with the news service Forum World Features, ostensibly owned by John Hay Whitney, publisher of The New York Herald - Tribune, provided fertile ground for the placement of material among

¹⁰ Blanche Weisen Cook, The Declassified Eisenhower: A Divided Legacy (New York: Doubleday, 1981), p.177.

¹¹ Robert E. Elder, The Information Machine: The United States Information Agency and American Foreign Policy (New York: Syracuse University, 1968), p.5.

¹² "C.I.A. Established Many Links to Journalists in U.S. and Abroad", The New York Times, 27 Dec 1977, p. 5.

¹³ "Worldwide Propaganda Network Built by the C.I.A", The New York Times, 26 Dec 1977, p.37.

both international and domestic audiences. The service had thirty member domestic clients, including the Washington Post.¹⁴

Complying with the Eisenhower administration's emphasis on private avenues of propaganda dissemination to complement official international information programs, the Central Intelligence Agency also used its financial resources to mobilize various individuals and organizations perceived as supporting American foreign policy. Eventually, this would include Agency support for some public relations promotion of Ngo Dinh Diem and America's escalating commitment to South Vietnam, a promotion orchestrated by the private public relations firm, Oram.

Oram's activities in support of Diem and South Vietnam had initially been conducted on behalf of its client, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), which, since 1954, had addressed the importance of South Vietnam through domestic American public relations and fundraising activities. The IRC's efforts inspired the creation of Are We Saving Vietnam? (AWSV), a political lobbying organization. Founded by former IRC staff member Joseph Buttinger in May, 1955, AWSV's program dedicated itself solely to generating American support for South Vietnam. Oram's representation of AWSV as its public relations agent maintained a continuity of promotion between AWSV and IRC; however, limited resources restricted the firm's activities to disseminating material and press clippings among members of Congress, the Senate and the media.

Central Intelligence Agency financial sponsorship and commitment to Joseph Buttinger to underwrite a more comprehensive public relations advocacy of Diem and South Vietnam in late 1955 rendered Are We Saving Vietnam? redundant. Agency funds initiated the creation by Buttinger of the American Friends of Vietnam (AFV), an institutionalized public relations organization unusual in its ability to mobilize domestic support and influence American foreign policy. Buttinger's contracting with Oram to continue to represent the promotion of South Vietnam under the AFV provided the lobby group with essential expertise and networks amongst the domestic anti-Communist community available to the firm, and Oram's subsequent contract in 1956 to represent the public relations activities of the South Vietnamese government unified the promotion of Ngo Dinh Diem under that agency's stewardship.

¹⁴ "Colby Acknowledges U.S. Press Picked Up Bogus C.I.A. Accounts", The New York Times, 28 December 1977, p.1.

As a prominent and successful public relations firm, Oram had a corporate culture and ideological orientation that reflected the perspective of its founder Harold Oram. The firm's extensive client list represented Oram's profoundly liberal, anti-Communist and anti-totalitarian commitments. Included among its clients were the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund and the National Congress on American Indians organizations. Other clients, reflective of an anti-Communist focus, were the Committee For One Million Against the Admission of Communist China to the United Nations, (conceptualized and established in Oram's offices), as well as Aid to Refugee Chinese Intellectuals and the American Emergency Committee For Tibetan Refugees.¹⁵ Such representations provided the firm extensive networks among prominent domestic anti-Communist individuals and organizations, potential supporters of Ngo Dinh Diem.

Oram's representation of Aid to Refugee Chinese Intellectuals and other anti-Communist political lobbying groups also established relationships between the firm and branches of the American government, including members of the American intelligence community. Central Intelligence Agency involvement and financial support of some of the firm's anti-Communist clientele was recognized and accepted amongst Oram's staff, who perceived the Agency as a more liberal and democratic alternative to the State Department. According to Henry Goldstein, Harold Oram's corporate successor:

The State Department was full of these patricians from New England, who controlled everything, the Protestant establishment, and they were illiberal, and they were conservative.... The CIA was ... less willing to support dictatorships in those days, they were trying to fight for democracy and they were backing things...that were vaguely centrist, and democratic, and the State Department wasn't. And even up to Vietnam that was true because the installation of Ngo Dinh Diem, when it started, was a counter force to the Bao Dai, who was a truly corrupt character.¹⁶

Staff conceptions of the Central Intelligence Agency as a more flexible and liberal body than the State Department were accompanied by gratitude for the Agency's funding. As Goldstein observed, "You could do business with them because they had total power over the money and so forth."¹⁷

The firm's relationship with the CIA also extended beyond a common ideology and financial support for Oram's clients. Within Oram, the CIA maintained a presence through the

¹⁵ Martin Liebman, Oral History, July 18, 1992, p.63, Oram Papers, Indiana University. Indianapolis Archive, A91-56.

¹⁶ Henry Goldstein, Oral History, 21 November 1991, p.18. Oram Papers, Indiana University, Indianapolis Archive, A91-56.

¹⁷ Martin Liebman, Oral History, Oram Papers, p.63.

firm's employment of former members of the intelligence agency. Gilbert Jonas, the account executive responsible for both the American Friends of Vietnam and the South Vietnamese contracts, and Oram vice-president Paul Frillman were recognized amongst the staff as having been employed by the Central Intelligence Agency in the past.¹⁸ The relationship between the American intelligence community and Oram was also supplemented by the exchange of correspondence between Harold Oram and Thomas Braden, the former deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency and first head of the Agency's propaganda operations during the late 1950's.¹⁹

Oram's role as the principal architect of a public relations campaign on behalf of Diem's leadership was premised upon perceptions within the firm of Diem's merit and viability within the larger context of conditions in South Vietnam. Initially limited in their understanding of Vietnamese events by a scarcity of information, Oram's staff came to support an indigenous leader perceived as a liberal, democratic alternative to Bao Dai, the Sects, or the Communists. Sharing the liberal, anti-Communist views of the larger American political culture and limited in their knowledge of South Vietnam, Oram staff members sought to promote for Americans an image of Ngo Dinh Diem consistent with predominate American Cold War values.

Oram's public relations activities in support of Diem and his potential role in South Vietnamese national security and development were thus founded upon the understanding that "every opinion is a marriage of information and values - information to generate a mental picture of what is at stake and values to make a judgment about it."²⁰ Accordingly, popular American understandings of the Cold War, Asian nationalism, moral virtue, and the United States' international role and destiny were applied by Diem's advocates to cast the frames within which Diem's popular image formation would be created.

Amongst the basic tenants of American political culture resided the perception of a special national destiny. Recall John Winthrop's Puritan proclamation that "We shall find that the God of Israel is among us, when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies, when he shall make us a praise and glory, that men shall say of succeeding plantations [settlements]: the Lord make it like that of New England: for we must Consider that we shall be as a City upon a Hill,

¹⁸ Martin Liebman, Oral History, p.58. and Henry Goldstein, Oral History, Oram Papers, p.16.

¹⁹ Henry Goldstein, Oral History, Oram Papers, p.78.

²⁰ John Zaller, "Information, Values and Opinions", American Political Science Review, 85 (December 1991), p.1216.

the eyes of all people are upon us."²¹ This Puritan vision supplemented by generations of New World democratic liberalism, established cognitive maps heavily influencing Americans during the 1950's, shaping their views and relationships with the world around them. Morality, virtue and God's will continued to be understood as synonymous with America. Conceptions that implied an altruistic orientation to its international relations and foreign policy were perceived to be unique in world affairs. America had a special mission expressed by John Adams "as the opening of a grand scene and design in the Providence for the illumination of the ignorant and the emancipation of the slavish part of mankind all over the world."²²

Reflecting the continued influence of these traditional tenets, many American's believed during the 1950's that the nation's role abroad was to establish democratic governments in its own image. Appreciation of the relative distinctiveness of divergent peoples, histories and cultures were deemed secondary to the perceived universal applicability of the American liberal democratic model. A solipsistic understanding of the world's peoples continued to support the optimistic belief that, given the opportunity, the world would embrace the United States as its archetype and patron. Accordingly, American audiences rejected the French experience in Indo-China as marred by colonialism and as irrelevant to America's own altruistic agenda.

American political culture in the 1950's was also defined in opposition to Communism both domestically and internationally. Representing the apparent antithesis of American values, the Communist threat reinforced traditional American ways of understanding the world. Postwar events, including Soviet expansion in Europe, the Berlin blockade, the loss of China, and the Korean war, cast Communism for the American people not simply as an international competitor, but as an inherently aggressive and expansionist force in opposition to human freedom and liberal global development.

In response to the Communist threat, ideas such as containment, the Munich analogy, and the domino theory were subsequently entrenched as dogma amongst both the American government and its populace, providing readily applicable references for understanding America's role and stake in the bipolar conflict. The outbreak of the Korean war appeared to validate the National Security Council's 1949 conception of the Communist threat as both unified and global in scale, thus obstructing any American delineation between vital and peripheral national interests,

²¹ Frances FitzGerald, *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam* (New York: Vintage, 1972), p. 109.

²² Lawrence H. Fuchs, *John F. Kennedy and American Catholicism* (New York: Meredith, 1967), p.15.

as the report had declared that "defeat of free institutions anywhere is a defeat everywhere."²³ The related domino theory led Americans to believe that South Vietnam's retention as an anti-Communist state was essential to the viability of all of Southeast Asia and India, and that, despite the complexities of Southeast Asian politics, the fall of one nation to Communism would cause all neighboring states eventually to succumb. American political culture had also fundamentally been shaped by the lessons offered by the Second World War. The Munich analogy was popularly accepted as requiring all free peoples promptly to resist aggression and totalitarianism. Appeasement and negotiation were perceived as synonymous with simply postponing and escalating the inevitable conflicts generated by expansive totalitarian states. As President Eisenhower observed during the tensions with China over Quemoy and Matsu, "a Western Pacific Munich would not buy us peace or security. It would encourage the aggressors. It would dismay our friends and allies. If history teaches us anything, appeasement would make it likely that we would have to fight a major war."²⁴

Conceptions of Communism as an alien ideology expanding through force and subversion, a totalitarian force that had to be contained in order to avoid eventual World War, encouraged Americans to establish viable national anti-Communist states. This Third World nation-building was also influenced by a traditional American cultural emphasis upon great men or individuals as the movers of history, at the expense of larger political, cultural or economic explanations. In the Third World, Americans naturally gravitated toward leaders considered to be anti-colonial, anti-Communist "Third Force" figures. In this composite of American commitments to nation - building, strong individual leadership, and nationalistic anti-Communism lay the intellectual landscape within which Ngo Dinh Diem would ultimately be placed.

Americans were also influenced by their scarcity of knowledge and experience with South Vietnam prior to the escalation of American involvement in the mid-1960's. Unfamiliarity with South Vietnam reflected the United States' traditional Eurocentric emphasis based upon immigration patterns, trade and established perceptions of vital national interests. Compounding South Vietnam's obscurity amongst domestic American military, diplomatic, academic and general audiences was the lack of any significant presence of American military troops in Indo-China during the Second World War. Even the expensive American support of the French involvement in Indo-China had failed to generate any significant American familiarity with South Vietnam's

²³ Loren Baritz, Backfire: A History of How American Culture Led Us Into Vietnam And Made Us Fight The Way We Did (New York: William Morow, 1985), p.67.

²⁴ "Radio and Television Report to the American People Regarding the Situation in the Formosa Straits, September 11, 1958, Public Papers of the Presidents – Eisenhower, 1958, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1964), p.694.

language, cultures, history, and contemporary politics. Michigan State University professor Wesley Fishel, a principal advisor on domestic affairs for the government of Ngo Dinh Diem, remarked of American knowledge of South Vietnam that, "we couldn't have chosen an area more alien to our experience and knowledge if we had tried to do so. The number of American scholars, expert on Vietnam and Indo-China, could have been numbered on one hand at the time of the Geneva Conference."²⁵ And in the 1960's, Department of Defense administrator Daniel Ellsberg commented that, "There has never been an official of Department Assistant Secretary rank or higher (including myself) who could have passed in office a midterm freshman exam in modern Vietnamese history, if such a course existed in this country"²⁶

Ignorance about Southeast Asia was also facilitated by the pall cast over the State Department following the repercussions from the "loss of China" and the rise of McCarthyism. The dismissal of State Department Asian Affairs experts John Carter Vincent and John Paton Davies, allied with the subsequent expectations of "positive loyalty", resulted in the loss or suppression of valuable Asian specialists and their analysis. The effect of eliminating personnel familiar with the region was compounded by the creation within the Department of a culture of fear which fostered conformity and optimistic analysis at the expense of independent thought.

Limited American knowledge and experience with South Vietnam served to shape the conception of Diem's leadership among his American advocates and later his critics. By accommodating Diem's public image formation with both American political culture and superficial public understanding of South Vietnam, Oram cast Diem in specific terms intended to resonate with American audiences. Portraying Ngo Dinh Diem as a popular nationalist liberal democrat determined to construct within South Vietnam a political and economic system reflective of the American model generated significant support among American audiences. Attributing to Diem personal and professional qualities reflective of the American political culture suggested the presence of attributes largely foreign to earlier American Asian partners such as Chiang Kai shek and Syngman Rhee. Casting Ngo Dinh Diem's leadership within the larger context of the Cold War also allowed his promoters to suggest his usefulness for an essential exercise in Third World nation-building to counter Communist expansion in Southeast Asia.

²⁵ William Conrad Gibbons, The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships, Part 1: 1945-1960 (New Jersey: Princeton, 1986), p.313.

²⁶ Loren Baritz, Backfire: A History of How American Culture Led Us Into Vietnam And Made Us Fight The Way We Did, (New York: William Morrow, 1985), p.21.

The ability of Oram and the American Friends of Vietnam to define Diem to American audiences necessitated more than an accommodation of his reputed image with American values and Cold War orthodoxies. American audiences depended upon the mass media as the principal agency for understanding the world around them. As a consequence, dissemination of material capable of mobilizing popular domestic American support for Diem's leadership and an American commitment to the South required integrating Oram's public relations infrastructure with the function and orientation of an American mass media driven by its own internal political economy.

The political economy of the American mass media included vulnerabilities of organization and function which permitted significant influence of media coverage and content by Diem's promotional advocates. Concentrated ownership of media outlets and the ability of owners to define the tenor of media sources under their control created "filters" that sanitized information and marginalized unacceptable perspectives.²⁷ Illustrative of the ability of media owners to harness their publications to their own personal agendas was Henry R. Luce, publisher of Time, Life and Fortune. Personally committed to the creation of the "American Century", Luce actively sponsored a role for his publications as an agent of anti-Communism through the support of new constitutional governments built to the American model. According to Luce:

Experts seem to agree that many of the existing nations of the world are not ready or able to establish stable constitutional governments. Indeed, only a very few of the nations of the world have a background in history and tradition conducive to constitutional government. Most other nations lack many other attributes, too. They lack currency, experience, they lack competent personnel, in many instances that are dangerously divided among themselves. All of this underlines the vastness and extraordinary difficulties of our task. The task nevertheless is there and we must undertake it - to promote and support constitutional governments.²⁸

Luce rejected the ideal of the media as disinterested and objective observer. Editorial responsibility in the Cold War was depicted as vital, as "all the qualities and command of President Eisenhower and all the thoughtful brilliance of John Foster Dulles will not win the Cold War - without us journalists.... It demands all the brains and time and energy we have. For the facts and the analysis have to be presented to the American people so that they may support not obvious

²⁷ Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media (New York: Pantheon, 1988), p.3-35.

²⁸ John K. Jessup, The Ideas of Henry Luce (New York: Atheneum, 1969), p.134.

decisions of necessity but difficult decisions of choice."²⁹ Fostering a definite agenda within his publications, Luce established climates and priorities which provided fertile ground for the placement of articles favorable to Diem's leadership of South Vietnam.

Editors and reporters often shared the same ideological perspectives as the owners, and such affinity was also fostered between members of the media and official sources premised upon ideological commonalities and reciprocal interests. Political affiliations resulted in the secondment of prominent editors and journalists from such publications as Reader's Digest, The New York Herald - Tribune, Time, and Life, to the Eisenhower administration as speech writers and media advisors.³⁰ Professional associations also encouraged the development of symbiotic relationships between official sources and the media personnel and organizations covering them.

The desire among government officials to secure favorable coverage of events was complemented by a mass media which was highly dependent on official sources. Official sources represented to the media rapidly and consistently available, inexpensive material, perceived among popular audiences as legitimate, authoritative, and knowledgeable. Independent investigation and coverage of events entailed significant expenditures and time, burdensome to large scale media sources and prohibitive to smaller outlets. Controversial coverage refuting the official or dominant position also necessitated additional expenses, as media deviation from the popularly accepted consensus required comprehensive investigation and corroboration. As a result of the objectivity accorded official sources by the media, an avenue of potential vulnerability was imposed upon media coverage and content:

The more "neutral" the press is - that is, the more it tries faithfully to transmit a record of "what transpired" (including therein the policy statements of officials) and the more constrained it feels about making judgments on the meaning or importance of "what transpires" - the more easily it lends itself to the uses of others, and particularly to public officials whom reporters have come to regard as prime sources of news merely by virtue of their positions in government.³¹

The financial restrictions imposed by the political economy of the mass media also had the additional effect of establishing a heavily tiered network among media outlets. Smaller scale publications developed a dependency upon the larger organizations, including news services, for coverage of events, which fostered substantial consensus. The costs associated with maintaining

²⁹ Jessup, The Ideas of Henry Luce p.80.

³⁰ Robert J. Donovan, Confidential Secretary: Ann Whitman's 20 years with Eisenhower and Rockefeller (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1988), p.89.

³¹ Daniel C. Hallin, "The Media, the War in Vietnam, and Political Support: A Critique of the Thesis of an Oppositional Media", Journal of Politics, February 1984, p.13.

coverage limited the representation of American news organizations in South Vietnam to three reporters during the late 1950's, producing standardized media coverage based upon the tier system and reliance upon American, South Vietnamese and other sources deemed legitimate.³²

The systematic promotion of Diem to American audiences under the guidance of Oram and the American Friends of Vietnam was always mindful of the media's essential nature. Encouraging personal and professional associations with owners, editors and journalists amongst prominent media sources, Oram sought to integrate Diem's public relations apparatus within the mass media's information processes. Accommodating the finite resources available to media outlets and the hierarchical structure among publications, Diem's advocates constructed ways of disseminating material intended to be authoritative and legitimate, inexpensive and readily available. Adapting to the political economy of the mass media permitted Diem's institutionalized public relations infrastructure to distribute promotional material in consistent and reaffirming terms. Their ability to influence to a significant degree the quality and quantity of coverage served to impart to the media the frames through which American audiences interpreted Diem's leadership. Such frames provide "persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol - handlers routinely organize discourse whether verbal or visual."³³ Dependent upon audiences' lack of familiarity with Vietnamese issues, Oram's media frames represented an essential means for manufacturing Diem's promotional representation into dominant American public opinion. This manufacturing of a hegemonic public view, based upon cultural values, knowledge of the issues, and new information necessitated the constant involvement of Diem's public relations agents in redefining and stereotyping his image to the American public.

Central Intelligence Agency financial support of Ngo Dinh Diem's public promotion among American audiences facilitated mobilization and institutionalization of a network of prominent Americans who had already been actively, but informally, sponsoring Diem's leadership and American involvement in South Vietnam prior to Diem's assumption of power in the South. Following the imposition of a Viet Minh death sentence in 1950, Diem had embarked upon a period in exile during which he attracted powerful supporters in the United States who would serve to sustain his leadership throughout the Eisenhower administration. Initially sponsored by influential members of the American Catholic Church, Diem used his purported nationalist, liberal, and

³² William Conrad Gibbons, The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War p.327.

³³ Todd Gitlin, The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media and the Making and Unmaking of the New Left (Los Angeles: University of California, 1980), p.9.

democratic qualities to win over many prominent and influential anti-Communist members of the Congress, the State Department, business, and the media.

Meeting with Michigan State University Professor Wesley Fishel in Tokyo, in 1950, Diem emphasized his commitment to nationalism, anti-Communism and social reform, thus forging a relationship which would result in Fishel's eventual secondment to South Vietnam as a principal advisor of the Diem regime. Following their meeting Fishel encouraged Diem to travel to Washington to seek support and arranged for Michigan State to help organize the visit. Upon his arrival in the United States, Diem's brother, Bishop Can, arranged for Diem to stay at the Maryknoll Seminary in Ossining, New York, where Diem gained the support of Father McGuire, a former missionary and expert on Asian affairs well known to the State Department. Determined to counter Diem's obscurity in politically influential circles, McGuire contacted Cardinal Spellman's foreign advisor, Bishop Griffiths, seeking to arrange a meeting between leading American Catholic clergymen and the Indo-Chinese exile leader.

Vehemently opposed to domestic and international Communism, Spellman believed Vietnam's fate was important to both the United States and Catholicism. To Spellman the Geneva Agreements would represent appeasement, "taps for the buried hopes of freedom in Southeast Asia! Now the devilish techniques of brainwashing, forced confessions, and rigged trials have a new locale for their exercise."³⁴ Spellman's personal concern over the fate of South Vietnam was shared by the Vatican. Seeking to counter the encroachment of Communism, Pope Pius XII turned to Spellman to encourage an increased American involvement in South Vietnam. Papal support for Diem's leadership was also issued as a consequence of the active campaigning within the Vatican by another of Diem's brothers, Archbishop Ngo Din Thuc.³⁵ Within this context, Diem succeeded in defining himself as a viable anti-Communist nationalist during his first meeting with Cardinal Spellman, securing the advocacy and patronage of the Cardinal and other influential members of the American anti-Communist community. Spellman's patronage provided Diem essential resources including credibility, legitimacy, and access to networks of prominent and influential anti-Communist activists within the American foreign policy community, business and media.

Spellman's initial endorsement of Diem was followed by a meeting that he arranged between the Indo-Chinese leader and members of the Church and State Department at Washington's Mayflower Hotel. Among those present were Father McGuire and three other anti-

³⁴ John Cooney, The American Pope: The Life and Times of Frances Cardinal Spellman (New York: New York Times Books, 1984), p.239.

³⁵ Cooney, The American Pope: The Life and Times of Frances Cardinal Spellman p.242.

Communist clerics, including Father Emmanuel Jacque, Bishop Howard Carrol and Georgetown's Edmund Walsh. Also among those invited to the meeting was Dean Rusk, the current head of the State Department's Asian Section. Gathered to assess Diem's viability as a leader of Indo-China, Diem's Mayflower audience accepted his personal commitment to the role of the Catholic Church and anti-Communist nationalism. Diem's ability to secure a meeting involving such prominent individuals was indicative of his growing stature and patronage among influential members of the American anti-Communist community.

Diem's next series of meetings established helpful relationships with senior members of the American foreign policy community, alliances which would last throughout the Eisenhower administration. Following his return from Indo-China and his disillusionment with the apparent inability of American aid to assist the French struggle against the Viet Minh, Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas met with and endorsed Ngo Dinh Diem as the sole viable representative of a Third Force in Vietnam.³⁶ Declaring Diem "revered by the Vietnamese because he is honest and independent and stood firm against French influence - a hero in Central and North Vietnam, with a considerable following in the South too", Douglas heralded Diem as a non-Communist, non-colonial candidate capable of securing popular support.³⁷ Diem's expanding network was further developed by Douglas' introduction of Diem to Senators Mike Mansfield and John F. Kennedy, in May, 1953.³⁸ Disillusioned by the French effort in Indo-China, both Senate foreign affairs experts sought a Third Force alternative. Again succeeding in presenting himself as the most viable non-colonialist, anti-Communist leader, Diem secured the support and sponsorship of both Mansfield and Kennedy, men who could help provide useful support during Diem's presidency in Vietnam.

However, prior to the resolution of the South Vietnamese Sect crisis in April, 1955, which eliminated the last vestiges of prominent alternative non-Communist leadership, declarations of support for Diem's newly established government among members of the American political and diplomatic communities represented attempts to defend his regime from French and domestic South Vietnamese opposition rather than to endorse or promote his leadership among American audiences. Senator Mike Mansfield's October 15, 1954, report to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee sought to fortify Diem's position against dissident General Hinh's rising opposition by

³⁶ Robert Scheer and Warren Hinckle, "The Vietnam Lobby", *Ramparts*, 4 July 1965, p.18, and Marvin E. Gettleman, *Vietnam and America: A Documented History* (New York: Meredith, 1967), p.118.

³⁷ Ellen J. Hammer, *A Death in November: America in Vietnam* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1987), p.46.

³⁸ Ellen J. Hammer, *A Death in November: America in Vietnam* p.46, Marvin E. Gettleman, *Vietnam and America*, p.119, and Robert Scheer, "The Vietnam Lobby," p.18.

sending an unambiguous message of support aimed at the Eisenhower administration, French colonial officials, and General Hinh himself. Mansfield declared that it was doubtful that "under the pressure of time a more satisfactory substitute for Diem" could be found and warned that in the event of Diem's removal "the United States should consider an immediate suspension of all aid to Vietnam and ... a complete reappraisal of our present policies."³⁹ French diplomats recognized Mansfield's report as a challenge to their desire to "continue to save South Vietnam regardless [of] individual personalities involved, including Diem"⁴⁰, and General Hinh quietly acquiesced after having been informed that the "Americans would cut off all dollar aid."⁴¹

Encouraged by Mansfield's influence within the Senate, Eisenhower implemented a program of nation-building intended to strengthen the Diem government in its relations with the French colonial administration and Vietnamese domestic dissidents. Committing the United States to an "intelligent program of American aid" if certain "standards of performance" were met, Eisenhower's October 23, 1954 letter served to redirect assistance by omitting the traditional French intermediary role. While the reputed focus of the assistance was "to assist the Government of Viet-Nam in developing and maintaining a strong, viable state, capable of resisting attempted subversion or aggression through military means", its immediate effect was to redefine the relationship between the Diem government and the French government and South Vietnamese anti-Communist movements.⁴²

Subsequent favorable public statements in support of Diem's leadership by members of the American diplomatic community continued to reflect the emphasis on reinforcing his leadership among South Vietnamese audiences and French colonial authorities. Statements by leading American diplomats in South Vietnam that "it was the policy of the United States to back the Diem government" and that support for the Army of Viet Nam was dependent upon the retention of Ngo Dinh Diem reflected this continuing concern.⁴³ Lingering doubts within the administration, the military and State Department as to Diem's viability, however, continued to limit both official commitment to Diem's administration and promotion of his leadership among American audiences.

³⁹ David L. Anderson, Trapped by Success: The Eisenhower Administration and Vietnam, 1953-1961, (New York: Columbia University, 1989), p.90.

⁴⁰ American Ambassador in France (Douglas Dillon) to the Department of State, 16 October 1954, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, vol XIII Indochina Part 2, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1982), p.2142.

⁴¹ "South Viet Nam's Diem: The Hour is Late, The Odds are Long", Time, 4 April 1955, p.24.

⁴² "Aid to the State of Viet-Nam: Message from the President of the United States to the President of the Council of Ministers of Viet-Nam, October 23, 1954," Department of State Bulletin, 15 November 1954, p.736.

⁴³ The Secretary of State to the Department of State, 17 December 1954, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, vol XIII Indochina Part 2, p.2273.

Thus, very significant advocacy of Diem's leadership following his assumption of power came from Lt. Colonel Edward Lansdale. A member of the Central Intelligence Agency attached to the Saigon Military Mission, Lansdale aggressively embarked upon a program to both entrench Diem against domestic opposition and depict him in favorable terms to members of the State Department and Eisenhower administration. Determined that "when the right cause is identified and used correctly, the anti-Communist cause becomes a pro-people fight", Lansdale influenced Diem to adopt a Western style public relations campaign based upon both wide-ranging political, social and economic reforms and his popular, charismatic leadership reflective of the American electoral model.⁴⁴ In addition to dedicating United States Information Service and Central Intelligence Agency personnel to the task of building support for Diem domestically, Lansdale established contacts and financial leverage among the Vietnamese newspapers in Saigon. Covert purchase of a Vietnamese language newspaper owned by "Dragon Lady" Anna Cang in January, 1955, resulted in its becoming "more supportive of the Diem government and receptive to USIS supplied material", as Cang "found it profitable to heed [Lansdale's] advice on the editorial content of her paper."⁴⁵

Lansdale's support of Ngo Dinh Diem also included informal activities intended to influence his representation in American media publications. Utilizing personal relationships between members of the American media and intelligence community, Lansdale succeeded in portraying negative evaluations of Diem's performance as a consequence of French propaganda and misinformation. Reporting to Washington on his association with prominent members of the American media, Lansdale cabled that:

Till and Peg Durdin of The New York Times, Hank Lieberman of The New York Times, Homer Bigart of The New York Herald - Tribune, John Mecklin of Time-Life, and John Roderick of Associated Press, have been warm friends of the SMM [Saigon Military Mission] and worked hard to penetrate the fabric of French propaganda and give the U.S. an objective account of events in Vietnam. The group met with us at times to analyze objectives and motives of propaganda known to them, meeting at their own request as U.S. citizens. These mature and responsible news correspondents performed a valuable service to their country.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Edward Geary Lansdale, In the Midst of Wars: An American's Mission to Southeast Asia (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p.164.

⁴⁵ Howard R. Simpson, Tiger in the Barbed Wire: An American in Vietnam, 1952-1991 (New York: Brassey's, 1992), p.137. and Marvin E. Gettleman Vietnam and America p.95.

⁴⁶ Telegram from Lansdale to the Department of State, United States - Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967: Study Prepared by the Department of Defense, Book 1., p.581.

In an effort to counter pessimistic evaluations regarding Diem's viability, Lansdale orchestrated a series of tours of the countryside for reporters to demonstrate Diem's popular ability to distribute public goods and services. Intended to complement Lansdale's consistently favorable evaluations of South Vietnamese government performance, the choreographed tours generated significant and favorable media coverage. Images of Diem welcomed by Buddhists, Catholic priests, Muslim sorcerers, lepers and barefoot tribesmen, according to Time, "startled foreign correspondents who had been low rating Diem's popular appeal".⁴⁷

Diem's popularity and domestic strength seemingly demonstrated by the tours also found some acceptance within the State Department. Telegrams from the Department's Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs to John Foster Dulles in the wake of the tours reported that "Diem's recent visit to Central Viet Nam resulted in impressive evidence of popular support which tends to belie French allegations of his lack of popularity."⁴⁸ Dulles cabled the Saigon embassy indicating that "according [to] recent information Diem is gaining popular support, had [a] highly successful trip through South Annam, now seems to be putting emphasis on making decisions."⁴⁹ Within South Vietnam itself, however, skeptical State Department officials familiar with the domestic situation urged caution, cabling that "Diem has given evidence of unexpected personal popularity, particularly in center but also in south. Here we must guard against using our own propaganda efforts as measures of this new popularity."⁵⁰

Even more than Lansdale, the Vietnam Lobby also sought to influence media coverage of Ngo Dinh Diem in January, 1955, by applying its informal network of associations to define his image in Time, Life, The Reporter, the New Republic, the New York Times, and the New York Herald - Tribune.⁵¹ Harold Oram's introduction of Joseph Buttinger to Cardinal Spellman instigated a series of meetings and introductions which would ultimately bring Buttinger into contact with some of the most influential members of the media and politics in the United States. Cardinal Spellman's subsequent referral of Buttinger to Joseph Kennedy in an effort to gain his patronage and support in influencing the Eisenhower administration was in turn followed by Kennedy's

⁴⁷ "Viet Nam: Ovation for Diem", Time, 17 January 1955, p.37.

⁴⁸ Telegram From the Charge in Vietnam, (Kidder) to the Department of State, 7 February 1955, Foreign Relations of the United States:1955-1957. Vol.1 Vietnam (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1985), p.78.

⁴⁹ Telegram from Secretary of State to the Embassy in Vietnam, 13 January 1955, Foreign Relations of the United States:1955-1957. Vol.1 Vietnam, p.33.

⁵⁰ Telegram from the Charge in Vietnam (Kidder) to the Department of State, 7 February 1955, Foreign Relations of the United States:1955-1957. Vol.1 Vietnam, p.78.

⁵¹ William Conrad Gibbons, The U.S. Government and The Vietnam War, p.303, John Cooney, The American Pope, p.242, and Marvin E. Gettleman, Vietnam and America, p.125.

arrangement of meetings between the lobbyist and Senator Mike Mansfield, Senator John F. Kennedy's assistant Ted Sorenson, Kenneth Young of the State Department and the editors of the New York Times, the Herald - Tribune, Time, and Life. Succeeding in placing articles in the Reporter and the New Republic, Buttinger reiterated his basic premise that the American media was "grossly misinformed" and that erroneous "information about the hopelessness of the Vietnamese situation was of French origin."⁵² Criticisms of Diem's leadership were dismissed as consequences of his limited power, while successful Northern refugee relocations and his apparent rural popularity were described as political triumphs.

Buttinger's introduction to the New York Times coincided with a fundamental shift in that publication's editorial emphasis and coverage. Times coverage of the Diem government's performance until January, 1955, consistently depicted his administration as ineffective, unable to unify either non-Communist politicians or members of the South Vietnamese military. An editorial on December 30, 1954, complained that "the government of Ngo Dinh Diem is riddled with feuds and incompetence and is woefully weak." Of particular concern to the publication were the overtly optimistic reports on the South Vietnamese government issued from American officials:

Those who read the first hand accounts of experienced correspondents on the spot can have few illusions. The serious American, British and French newspapers and news weeklies have built a consistent picture, and it is a decidedly alarming one. The professional soldier, the professional diplomat and sometimes the visiting American Congressman have for understandable reasons and with the best intentions drawn a much more hopeful and optimistic picture.

The Times concluded that the Vietnamese situation would continue to worsen "if the present official complacency and public optimism continue."⁵³

Following Buttinger's meeting with staff in January, 1955, the publication radically redefined its coverage of Diem, actively endorsing and praising his leadership. A series of editorial articles regarding Diem's performance in late January reveal the transition of the newspaper within days towards a position of unqualified praise and demands for American support. On the 20th, the Times wrote that "before the turn of the year there were a good many more pessimists than optimists among Washington officials who read the confidential dispatches from Saigon. Now the optimists are gaining the upper hand. In the opinion of these officials, press and magazine reports

⁵² Joseph Buttinger, "An Eyewitness Report on Vietnam", Reporter, 27 January 1955, p.16.

⁵³ "Facts About Vietnam," The New York Times, 30 December 1954, p.16.

from the field have not caught up to the new drift of affairs."⁵⁴ The following day the Times contextualized its shifting coverage of South Vietnam, writing that "the situation is obviously fluid and the tone of the news is a matter of emphasis rather than of fact."⁵⁵ One week later the newspaper wrote that "gloom over the future of free Indochina is giving way to cautious optimism here." Reported improvements were directly attributed to Diem as he was described as "a sound and tenacious leader, and a true nationalist." Indeed, he was "believed by American officials to have as strong appeal to the nationalist-minded people as any of the leaders of the Communist dominated Viet Minh in North Vietnam."⁵⁶ By January 29th, the Times' coverage had evolved into strong endorsement of Diem's leadership:

There has so long been a history of deceptively encouraging reports flowing to Washington from Southeast Asia, so long a history of official hopes raised by optimistic predictions only to be dashed by dark reality, that there is ample excuse for taking the most recent ones with a grain of salt. But this time the foundation seems more solid, resting as they do on the character and determination of a Premier of integrity who is free from all taint of Communism or colonialism, and who has wholehearted American backing in his effort to bring about long-overdue and desperately needed changes in the wretched political, military and economic structures of Viet Nam.⁵⁷

At this stage, the Vietnam Lobby's media intervention was isolated and informal. Effective in altering media portrayal of Diem in a few prominent publications, the Lobby's advocacy represented neither a systematic nor institutionalized attempt to construct a hegemonic conception of South Vietnam's leadership among American audiences. Their media involvement illustrated only their potential influence at this stage. Their best efforts were yet to come.

Public relations advocacy regarding the importance of the South Vietnamese cause to American national security interests was also undertaken in 1954 by the political lobbying groups, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Are We Saving Vietnam? (AWSV). Prior to Diem's victory over the Sects in May, 1955, the tenuous nature of his leadership caused the IRC and AWSV to distinguish his leadership from the South Vietnamese cause. The bulk of IRC promotional activities focused upon the flight of the North Vietnamese refugees to the South, their anti-Communist aspirations and commitments, and the obligation of the United States to help provide for their well-being, and IRC depiction of South Vietnam as an essential American interest provided an important precursor to the selling of Diem. Public support and commendations of the

⁵⁴ "South's Premier Gaining Strength: Ngo Dinh Diem Said to Extend Control over Armed Sects in Southern Vietnam", The New York Times, 20 January 1955, p.3.

⁵⁵ "News From Vietnam," The New York Times, 21 January 1955, p.22.

⁵⁶ "Hopeful Outlook for Free Vietnam Reported by General Collins," The New York Times, 28 January 1955, p.1.

⁵⁷ "Hope in Vietnam," The New York Times, 29 January 1955, p.14.

IRC's campaigns from President Eisenhower, John Foster Dulles, and other prominent Americans legitimized the effort, and the IRC's advocacy of the South also fostered informal associations among domestic American anti-Communists concerned with defending the South, associations which would subsequently be mobilized in support of Diem's leadership under the American Friends of Vietnam.

International Rescue Committee personnel in South Vietnam also fostered *Are We Saving Vietnam?* (AWSV), the first legislative lobbying group solely dedicated to increasing American involvement in South Vietnam. AWSV's founder Joseph Buttinger began his staunch advocacy of the South Vietnamese cause and Diem's leadership as a result of his earlier involvement with the IRC program in South Vietnam. Founded in May, 1955, AWSV was soon subordinated to Buttinger's more ambitious political legislative lobbying organization, the CIA funded American Friends of Vietnam, in December 1955.⁵⁸ In appreciation of Buttinger's consistent personal commitment to Diem's leadership, the IRC recalled that "when Mr. Buttinger returned to the United States, he embarked upon an energetic campaign of information which played an important role in persuading the American press and officialdom that, given proper support, there was every reason to be confident that the government of Ngo Dinh Diem could survive."⁵⁹

American opposition to the approaching 1956 national elections in Vietnam was supported by *Are We Saving Vietnam?*, since they had considerable faith in the determined anti-Communist aspirations of the South Vietnamese people and the ability of the United States to effectively influence events in the South. Reflecting this optimism, Joseph Buttinger observed that "I am convinced that there is no country in the world in which the United States' prestige is as high as in Vietnam. United States political interference is desired by the vast majority of all politically conscious people."⁶⁰ Subsequently, "American public opinion should make it clear immediately that the American people will not allow our government to lend a hand in the execution of a scheme which will enslave ten million people in the name of a democratic right."⁶¹

⁵⁸ Henry Goldstein, Oram Papers, A91-56, p.80. and American Friends of Vietnam, "Minutes of the Second Meeting Committee of The American Friends of Vietnam," 26 January 1956, Oram Papers, Indiana University; Indianapolis Archive, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 16.

⁵⁹ International Rescue Committee, "Saving Freedom's Seed Corn: The First 25 Years of the International Rescue Committee, Operation Brotherhood," n.d., Oram Papers, Indiana University, Indianapolis Archive, A92-19, Box 15 Folder 4.

⁶⁰ Joseph Buttinger, *Are We Saving Vietnam?*, "Memorandum on Indochina (Vietnam)", n.d., Oram Papers, Indiana University, Indianapolis Archive, A92-19, Box 3 Folder 7.

⁶¹ Joseph Buttinger, "Are We Saving Vietnam?: An Analysis of the Conflict Between United States and French Policy in Vietnam," Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 13, Folder 7, p.13.

AWSV also sought to marginalize criticism of Diem's performance by attributing his government's difficulties not to the Communists or Sects, but to the flagrant opposition of the French government and colonialists. A French "policy of obstruction" oriented toward "preventing the establishment of a strong government in the South" was viewed by Buttinger as contrary to the interests and policies of both the Diem government and the United States.⁶² French opposition to Diem was further reviled by AWSV as "cooperation between the colonialists and the Communists, aimed at the prevention of the establishment of a strong democratic and independent regime in Southern Vietnam."⁶³ This interpretation of events permitted AWSV to counter criticisms of Diem's leadership while suggesting that the interests of the United States and the Diem government commonly depended on resisting the French. Indeed, according to Buttinger, Diem could be properly evaluated only after French influence were eliminated:

If we had not defended Diem up to now, and if we do not continue to defend him against further French attempts to replace him, no chance for the development of a truly democratic regime would exist today. I think that Diem himself, once the threat of French success against him is removed, will be quite willing to discuss, and will for the first time also be politically free enough to adopt the necessary democratic modifications of some of his attitudes. Whether the premier has lost valuable collaborators, refused to cooperate with others, and failed to rally certain well-disposed elements of the sects as well as many spokesmen of minor political groups because of an arbitrary nature and a sectarian political concept, as his critics claim, we can find out only after his bitter struggle against the French is won. Up to now a free discussion of this problem, necessary for an objective judgment, was impossible.⁶⁴

Despite his support for Diem's leadership, however, Buttinger refused to make American assistance to the South contingent upon the retention of the Diem regime. Uncertain as to the viability of Diem's government, AWSV sought to mobilize support for the larger cause of South Vietnam. "We are not trying to save a man" they argued. "We are trying to save a people. We are not fighting for a person, we are fighting for a policy to save South Vietnam."⁶⁵ Full commitment to the selling of Diem would depend on his ability to position himself as the paramount leader within the chaotic South Vietnamese political environment.

⁶² Buttinger, "Are We Saving Vietnam?: An Analysis of the Conflict Between United States and French Policy in Vietnam," p.10 and ⁶² Joseph Buttinger, "Are We Saving Vietnam?", "Memorandum on Indochina (Vietnam)", n.d., p.2. Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 3 Folder 7.

⁶³ Buttinger, "Are We Saving Vietnam?", "Memorandum on Indochina (Vietnam)", p.5.

⁶⁴ Joseph Buttinger, "Are We Saving Vietnam?: An Analysis of the Conflict Between United States and French Policy in Vietnam," n.d., p.18. Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 13, Folder 7.

⁶⁵ Buttinger, "Are We Saving Vietnam?: An Analysis of the Conflict Between United States and French Policy in Vietnam," p.18.

AWSV and Buttinger identified the American public's popular support as the principal instrument in their struggle for increasing the American government's involvement in South Vietnam, a tactical emphasis that would define Buttinger's subsequent involvement with the American Friends of Vietnam. Decrying the American public's "unfamiliar" and "largely misinformed" understanding of South Vietnamese events and conditions, AWSV associated potential change in American foreign policy with the mobilization of popular sentiment. "In order to take the necessary bold steps to support the Vietnamese," Buttinger concluded, "Washington has to feel the support, and be subject to the pressure, of an altered public opinion. Such support and pressure has to come from all sectors of the American political community." Success, in Buttinger's judgement, seemed likely:

The sentiment of the American people favors a firm anti-Communist stand. It is true that sentiment alone cannot produce a correct policy, but sentiment will mobilize support for it. My own experience is that Americans of all social strata respond quickly to a cause in which their anti-Communist feelings and convictions are not exploited for selfish group interests or for political aims which they reject. Our government and the leaders of American public opinion may soon discover that they can mobilize more sympathy and political energy in defense of the cause now symbolized by Mr. Diem than they were ever able to mobilize for the cause of General Chiang Kai-Shek, President Rhee or Chancellor Adenauer.⁶⁶

Improvements in Ngo Dinh Diem's political position following his April, 1955, victory over the Sects, allied with Central Intelligence Agency funding of Buttinger's public relations initiatives, energized the American Friends of Vietnam. Skillfully managed by Oram, the Vietnam Lobby was ready to nurture a growing constituency within the United States concerned with the maintenance of an anti-Communist South Vietnam.

⁶⁶ Buttinger, "Are We Saving Vietnam?: An Analysis of the Conflict Between United States and French Policy in Vietnam," p.16.

Constructing a Consensus

Promotion of Ngo Dinh Diem to American audiences as a viable, virtuous leader of South Vietnam essential to the South's independence and prosperity evolved from both earlier public relations efforts and Diem's ability to cast himself as the sole nationalist political candidate capable of uniting the South in opposition to Communism. Representing unusually significant influence in American foreign policy, Diem's public relations advocates succeeded in manufacturing a consensus among American audiences as to Diem's merit, a consensus based upon idealized public relations constructs that would for several years resist major erosions of credibility.

Central Intelligence Agency money provided to Joseph Buttinger through either the Kaplan or Granary Funds sponsored the establishment of the American Friends of Vietnam in April, 1955.⁶⁷ Represented by Oram, the AFV became the first agency to systematically promote Diem's leadership apart from the larger South Vietnamese cause. Dedicated to mobilizing domestic American popular sentiment as leverage to both support and shape official American policy in South Vietnam, the AFV's ability to define terms of reference for understanding Diem allied with its prominent membership in Congress, business, and the mass media, enabled the organization to exert considerable influence on American foreign policy. Intrinsic to the success of the AFV's lobbying and public relations was Oram's careful adaptation of the organization's campaign material to American political culture, American's limited knowledge of South Vietnam, and the political economy of the mass media.

While the AFV described its purpose as an effort "to broaden mutual understanding of Vietnamese and American history, culture, and democratic institutions; and to assist in the achievement of educational, health, rehabilitation, economic and general welfare programs for the Vietnamese people," the organization's real goals were less vaguely altruistic.⁶⁸ The consistent focus of the AFV as the institutionalization of the Vietnam Lobby was to both promote the South Vietnamese cause among American audiences as essential to American national interests and to represent Diem as the sole individual capable of effective leadership in Vietnam. Established as a highly structured and systematic organization, the AFV dedicated itself to defining the terms of debate in order to construct a dominant public conception of Diem and his government. This conception would not dictate precise media coverage or foreign policy formulation; rather, it would frame the issues defining appropriate perceptions and orientation. As a fluid and dynamic

⁶⁷ Henry Goldstein, Oral History, Oram Papers, A91-56, p.80.

⁶⁸ American Friends of Vietnam, Press Release n.d., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 17.

constructs, such as hegemonic frameworks, particularly when challenged by alternative information, require constant promotion and maintenance. Oram's development of the AFV thus relied on enough flexibility to adapt to changing issues and concerns in order to mobilize influential support.

The AFV from its inception sought to attract a prominent and influential membership to position the AFV as an important and legitimate participant in the domestic foreign policy community. Recruiting heavily from the informal Vietnam Lobby, Oram attracted the support of large numbers of prominent and early champions of Diem's leadership.⁶⁹ The initial focus of the campaign was to "secure a figure of national reputation" to head the organization and then "surround that individual with an executive committee that had a knowledge of the field."⁷⁰ Oram selected General John. W. O'Daniel, a nationally prominent military figure with knowledge of Southeast Asia, as Chairman of the American Friends of Vietnam, someone who could provide the legitimacy and authority the position required. The organization's Executive Committee, however, provided the organization with its effective day-to-day leadership. In establishing the Executive, Oram drew heavily upon earlier advocates of Diem, including nine members of the International Rescue Committee Executive, also an Oram client. Moreover, the firm itself maintained a significant presence on the committee. Joining Chairman of the Executive Committee, Joseph Buttinger, were Harold Oram, Oram Vice-President and AFV Treasurer Elliot H. Newcomb, and Oram staff member and former CIA employee Gilbert Jonas. Newcomb and Jonas were also Oram account executives with the AFV, which, allied with Harold Oram's presence, permitted significant influence on the conduct of the organization.

AFV Executive Committee minutes consistently indicate the emphasis the board placed on attracting prominent members. The minutes of the first meeting reported that "80 distinguished Americans [had] already joined the American Friends of Vietnam as founding members. They included a large portion of Congressmen, including almost 1/3 of the membership of the Foreign Affairs Committee, and are one of the most distinguished groups ever organized to promote relations between the U.S. and another friendly country."⁷¹ After only two months, the AFV attracted thirty-two members of the House of Representatives and five Senators, a wide diversity of individuals including liberals John F. Kennedy, Richard Neuberger and Hubert H. Humphrey, as well as conservatives J. Bracken Lee, William F. Knowland and Karl Mundt. Socialist Norman Thomas was included, as was diplomat Angier Biddle Duke and intellectuals Max Lerner, and

⁶⁹ American Friends of Vietnam, Memorandum to his Excellency Tran Van Chuong" 11 October 1956 p.4., Oram Papers, A90-39, 5/7

⁷⁰ Henry Goldstein, Oral History, Oram Papers, A91-56, p.35.

⁷¹ American Friends of Vietnam, "Minutes of the first meeting of the Executive Committee of the American Friends of Vietnam" 8 December 1955, p.1., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1 Folder 16.

Arthur Schlesinger Jr. AFV membership lists also included former head of the Office of Strategic Services, General “Wild Bill” Donovan, and the successful publisher of Time and Life, anti-Communist activist Henry R. Luce. Traditional proponents of Diem such as Senator Mike Mansfield, Leo Cherne, Wesley R. Fishel and Wolf Ladejinski also joined the AFV, thus extending their prestige and reputations to the cause of supporting Diem and South Vietnam. And reflecting Oram’s desire to impart an image of broadly based non-partisan consensus, was the lobby’s courtship of American organized labor, specifically members of the AFL/CIO.⁷² Labor’s supporters would increasingly become the focus of AFV promotional activities during subsequent periods of critical media coverage of Diem’s repression of civil liberties.

The AFV’s membership rolls, while legitimating the lobby with domestic audiences, also sent a powerful message of support for the Diem regime to the Eisenhower administration in Washington. Bi-partisan Congressional representation in the organization ensured that the administration was aware of significant consensus within the foreign policy community, a consensus the AFV Executive nurtured by disseminating promotional information directly to its influential supporters. Due to the scarcity of alternative information prior to late 1957, the AFV was consistently able to conduct informational campaigns familiarizing its membership with the political, social and economic advantages of Diem’s leadership. Recognizing the potential of this avenue of communication, the AFV’s Executive even established a routine of legitimating its material to its own supporters by funneling it through the “more expert members of the Committee” who would then “disseminate it among the other Committee members.”⁷³ As a result of this informational campaign among its own membership, independent statements and endorsements by members affiliated with the AFV largely reflected the organization’s basic points of view.

As a political public relations group, the AFV sought to supplement its networking and lobbying activities within prominent and influential circles with appeals to broader domestic audiences. According to the AFV’s Treasurer, “however desirable our individual deeds may be, they will be wasted unless we have enough people operating in a large and effective enough way to weight down the see-saw [on] our side.”⁷⁴ Generating the necessary popular support and consensus among American audiences to influence official policy required the construction of

⁷² American Friends of Vietnam, “Minutes of the second meeting of the Executive Committee of the American Friends of Vietnam” 26 January 1956, p.2., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1 Folder 16.

⁷³ American Friends of Vietnam, “Minutes of the third meeting of the Executive Committee of the American Friends of Vietnam” 14 February 1956, p.1., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1 Folder 16.

⁷⁴ AFV Treasurer to Harold Oram- Personal Correspondence, Monday- undated, p.1., Oram Papers, A90-39 59/7.

hegemonic frames of reference for evaluating Diem and South Vietnam. The AFV thus adopted a calculated program to ensure that it could effectively provide sufficient quality and quantity of coverage to promote the Vietnamese leader in constant and reaffirming terms.

Oram's sponsorship of the AFV's, Program of Activities in March, 1956, provided the foundation for its public promotion of Diem. Premised upon a sophisticated understanding of the political economy of the mass media, the Program of Activities noted the hierarchical nature of publications and the inability of most, aside from prominent papers like the New York Times and the major wire services, to maintain a presence in South Vietnam. Recognizing the media's dependence upon rapidly available material from legitimate sources at minimal cost, the AFV shaped its campaign to accommodate those needs, and, while injecting its agenda into key segments of the media, the Program also produced information in sufficient quantities to overwhelm any competing image of Diem and his leadership.

The AFV established a permanent office in New York "charged with the responsibility of raising funds, increasing membership, developing contacts, informing the media, issuing a regular bulletin and special memoranda,...[and] carrying on research."⁷⁵ Established to provide an authoritative resource to the national media, the office was instructed to "establish a reputation as an information and resource center which will cause editors, columnists and commentators to have frequent recourse to it in preparing material on Vietnam."⁷⁶ The New York office was charged with producing "a carefully prepared monthly Intelligence Digest, tying together and analyzing all the information that has become available over the preceding period."⁷⁷ Complimenting the Digest, a small library was established to permit the AFV rapidly to produce public relations material and to present itself as a valuable resource center. Buttinger's private collection, reported to be "probably the best available outside of the United Nations", was included, enabling the library to describe itself as an essential and authoritative center for "scholars and other interested persons" at a time when information about South Vietnam was extremely scarce.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ American Friends of Vietnam, "Program of Activities for the American Friends of Vietnam for the Six Month Period Commencing March 1, 1956," p.2., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 16.

⁷⁶ American Friends of Vietnam, "Program of Activities for the American Friends of Vietnam", p.3.

⁷⁷ American Friends of Vietnam, "Program of Activities for the American Friends of Vietnam", p.2.

⁷⁸ American Friends of Vietnam, "Program of Activities for the American Friends of Vietnam", p.2. and American Friends of Vietnam, "Minutes of the Executive Committee of the American Friends of Vietnam," 14 March 1956, p.2., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1 Folder 16.

Efforts to integrate the AFV's activities with other prominent individuals and organizations were also begun. Under Oram's guidance, the American Friends of Vietnam conducted a campaign to "maintain contact with the leaders of key ...national organizations" and to nurture their interest in Southeast Asia. The goal of this policy was to raise the profile of the AFV, establish close relationships with related groups, and secure a measure of prestige and legitimacy generated from association with authoritative supporters.⁷⁹ The Program of Activities organized national conferences, highly structured and formalized events with specific agendas and goals. Conceptualized as media events drawing together a diversity of selected individuals such as George Meany, Nelson Rockefeller, Senator Mike Mansfield, Walter Robertson, General Matthew Ridgeway, and Joseph Buttinger, along with organizations such as the American Federation of Labor, the National Association of Manufacturers, the National Council of Churches of Christ, the National Grange, the American Legion, the meetings generated a manufactured consensus among the diverse participants. Then at the conclusion of a conference, the AFV created an editorial committee to "draw up a report to the American people made public over the signatures of the participants."⁸⁰ The testimonies of such prominent and influential individuals and organizations generated significant and largely unchallenged national coverage for Diem in the domestic media, a benefit well recognized by both Oram and the AFV.

National lecture tours were also included in Oram's program as an effective vehicle for disseminating selected material tailored to specific audiences. The tours were considered a means to bring "interested" audiences into contact with the organization. Authoritative AFV members with specialized knowledge about South Vietnam, men such as O'Daniel, Wesley Fishel, and Wolf Ladejinski, were organized by Oram to conduct national tours focused primarily upon university audiences and other potentially significant groups.⁸¹ The importance the AFV Executive attributed to this mechanism of promotion and recruitment was reflected in their minutes, as they consistently monitored audience size and composition.

The Program also directed the AFV to establish informal relationships with influential members of the domestic media. To supplement the Intelligence Digest and library's liaison functions, the AFV concluded that an "intense effort must be made to enlist the co-operation of key editors, columnists and commentators in presenting the facts to the American public and

⁷⁹ American Friends of Vietnam, "Program of Activities for the American Friends of Vietnam for the Six Month Period Commencing March 1, 1956," p.3., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 16.

⁸⁰ American Friends of Vietnam, "Program of Activities for the American Friends of Vietnam", p.3

⁸¹ American Friends of Vietnam, "Program of Activities for the American Friends of Vietnam", p.3. and "Ladejinski - Gregory Itinerary", Ladejinski, Wolf - American Embassy, Saigon, Vietnam, Oram Papers, Indiana University. Indianapolis Archive, A90 - 39 35/7 - 35/10.

arousing their interest."⁸² This cultivation of the media was an essential aspect in the AFV campaign, as it provided an effective instrument in securing favorable and consistent coverage. Indeed, such networking would become increasingly important by the end of the Eisenhower administration as critical coverage of Diem and the GVN escalated and as the AFV and Oram were forced to rely upon strong personal interventions to influence media content.

A new dynamic to the selling of Diem was established in 1956 with Oram's receipt of the public relations contract for Diem's South Vietnamese government. The amalgamation of the AFV and South Vietnamese contracts represented a commonality of purpose which gave Oram an unusual capacity to conduct lobbying campaigns in support of Diem. The new agreement provided Oram and the Vietnam Lobby with increased resources, access to information on the South Vietnamese situation, and a bilateral avenue of communication between Diem and his American advocates. This mutually supportive and cooperative effort between Diem's government and his American promoters remained in effect until tensions developed over the South Vietnamese contract in 1960. Throughout this period the GVN maintained a low profile, permitting the AFV to represent itself as the major defender of South Vietnam and related American interests. Consequently, while delineating the activities of either client independent of the other becomes problematic, Oram's role as chief architect of the promotion of Diem and Vietnam remained constant.

Oram's contract with the Government of Vietnam was nominally conducted through Wolf Ladejinski, Diem's principal land reform expert at the American embassy in Saigon. The terms of the contract provided Oram \$3,000 per month plus expenses and was in its first year the responsibility of Elliot Newcomb, Harold Oram's partner and an AFV member.⁸³ Succeeding Newcomb in 1957 as account executive and campaign director was Gilbert Jonas, a former Central Intelligence Agency employee actively involved in Asian affairs. For the remainder of Eisenhower's term, Jonas enthusiastically directed both AFV and GVN advocacy of Diem and his government. Indeed, as a consequence of the GVN contract, Harold Oram, Elliot Newcomb and Gilbert Jonas were required to register with the Department of Justice as agents of a foreign power.

Cooperative promotion of Diem by the AFV and GVN under Oram's umbrella extended well beyond the 1956 Program of Activities. Public relations and political lobbying efforts focused

⁸² American Friends of Vietnam, "Program of Activities for the American Friends of Vietnam for the Six Month Period Commencing March 1, 1956," p.2., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 16.

⁸³ Robert Scheer, "The Vietnam Lobby," Ramparts, 4 July 1965, p.21.

heavily upon injecting AFV views into the foreign policy community and expanding the Lobby's association with segments of the media. These efforts were principally directed from the offices of Oram using the AFV's reputation and membership to represent its agenda as a non-partisan expression of support among authoritative Americans concerned with South Vietnam and the retention of Diem's leadership.

An immediate focus of Oram's evolving strategy for promoting Diem and the GVN was to establish close connections with officials of the American government.⁸⁴ Such connections were viewed as effective means to influence official policy and gather additional information on South Vietnam. "Periodic meetings with appropriate State Department sections" were encouraged as a good way to address the "necessity for a continuous flow of information and coordination of policy with U.S. government activities in Vietnam."⁸⁵ AFV's overture to the State Department through Paul Kattenberg of the Vietnam Desk initiated a relationship, considered by Harold Oram to be unique, as "no other similar groups in the country has such a liaison apparatus with the government."⁸⁶ The AFV's ability to seek out and establish a close working relationship with the State Department and other official foreign policy bodies reflected the ability of Oram to define his organization as sharing with the government a commonality of purpose in supporting American interests in Southeast Asia.

Indicative of the AFV's growing prestige and ability to establish avenues of communication with policy-making bodies was an invitation by the White House to brief Eisenhower on Diem and South Vietnam in February, 1956. Promoting Diem's effective stewardship of the South, AFV Chairman O'Daniel confidently informed Eisenhower that "Diem has the ship of state headed in the right direction." Indicating that Diem had prepared the South Vietnamese army "to do a first-class fighting job" and that plans for land reform had been understandably postponed pending rural pacification, O'Daniel reported that Diem's South Vietnamese government would remain successful with continued American support.⁸⁷ Proclaiming the briefing "refreshing," Eisenhower encouraged O'Daniel to present his report to Congress, and, appearing before the House Sub-Committee for Far Eastern Affairs in March, 1956, O'Daniel received a favorable reception as the members praised his activities, the AFV, Diem, and the U.S. record in South Vietnam. The Committee provided a receptive venue for

⁸⁴ American Friends of Vietnam, "Minutes of the Third Meeting of the Executive Committee of the American Friends of Vietnam," 14 February 1956, p.1., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1 Folder 16.

⁸⁵ American Friends of Vietnam, "Minutes of the Third Meeting of the Executive Committee", p.2.

⁸⁶ American Friends of Vietnam, "Minutes of the Third Meeting of the Executive Committee", p.2.

⁸⁷ David L. Anderson, *Trapped by Success: The Eisenhower Administration and Vietnam, 1953-1961*, (New York: Columbia University, 1989), p.159.

O'Daniel's message, as its Chairman, Clement J. Zablocki, had earlier in 1955 joined other House Foreign Affairs members in declaring that "the government of Ngo Dinh Diem is demonstrating really admirable and remarkable courage in facing problems which would cause lesser men to throw up their hands in despair."⁸⁸ According to a State Department official attending the presentation, it was "obvious that the Committee was prepared to take General O'Daniel's word without question on most of the points raised."⁸⁹

Oram also sought to enhance avenues of communication between the AFV and the domestic media. Supplementing pre-existing associations between Oram's staff and prominent writers and editors, a campaign was conducted to integrate the Diem lobby with the Overseas Press Club. Having 1,520 members in 1956, the Club functioned as an influential forum for providing research, information and personal associations among its members, and, according to its promotional literature, the Club conducted weekly luncheons with public figures and international leaders which "on or off the record have provided rich new background to members who interpret the news."⁹⁰ The function of the Club as a principal forum for shaping foreign media coverage encouraged the AFV to regularly select it as the site for its Executive Committee meetings during 1956, and, during the remainder of the Eisenhower administration, the association between Oram and the OPC deepened as Oram used both formal and informal relationships to influence media coverage of Diem and South Vietnam.

The Vietnam Lobby's promotion of Diem among influential American publications increasingly became a focus in Oram's public relations campaign. Recognizing the mass media's need to feature authors perceived as authoritative in the field, Oram disseminated the pro-Diem message utilizing AFV members and supporters. Soliciting works from such prominent foreign policy experts and Diem advocates as Senator Mike Mansfield, Wolf Ladejinski and Wesley Fishel reflected a comprehensive effort to communicate the Vietnam Lobby's agenda to the media in a comprehensive, consistent and reaffirming campaign. The legitimacy of such authors, perceived to be knowledgeable in their field, permitted their ready inclusion within major publications while imparting a measure of authority to the material. And wishing to present the appearance of diverse international support for Diem and American policy in South Vietnam, Oram instructed the

⁸⁸ William Conrad Gibbons, The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships, Part 1: 1945-1960 (New Jersey: Princeton, 1986), p. 301.

⁸⁹ David L. Anderson, Trapped by Success, p. 160.

⁹⁰ Overseas Press Club of America, Inc., "Who's Who 1958-1959," p.2., Oram Papers, Indiana University. Indianapolis Archive, A90-39, 41/7.

AFV to seek not only American authors but also Vietnamese and French.⁹¹ Under Oram's guidance, authors solicited to produce works were presented with predefined criteria. Both subject matter and format were provided to these authors as a means of structuring articles to accommodate both publication requirements and Oram's current public relations emphasis.

Selection of material was often handled by Joseph Buttinger. Charged with orchestrating the campaign, Buttinger was instructed that each article had to be "on some one aspect of Vietnam - political, economic, agricultural, educational, etc. Only occasionally [would there be] a once over lightly about everything in Vietnam."⁹² Throughout Buttinger's program, Diem was consistently depicted as the architect of South Vietnamese reform. All progressive domestic reforms and successful security measures were attributed to his leadership, and his retention was described as essential to South Vietnam's survival. The cumulative effect of these reaffirming efforts promoted a hegemonic framework for evaluating Diem and his GVN, effectively marginalizing alternative critical viewpoints as unrepresentative and unfounded.

Publication of Oram-inspired works in respected journals generated an invaluable supply of reprint material to the public relations campaign. Reprints gave Oram flexibility in presenting articles as objective, authoritative and distinct from its own public relations program. The utility of an article for reprinting was dependent upon both its original authorship and the status of the original host publication. Inclusion in a good quality or widely distributed publication granted the article additional circulation and legitimacy. Accordingly, articles included in the New York Times and the Hearst Press received particular Oram attention. Disseminated widely during information and fund raising campaigns, reprints remained an effective and heavily emphasized instrument of Oram's public relation operations in support of Diem's leadership.

Another mechanism used by the AFV to generate media coverage of its personalized promotion of Diem were public statements. The national prominence of the organization and its membership ensured that AFV public statements and its open letters to Diem and the GVN found ready inclusion among diverse domestic publications. And, to enhance the news worthiness of its efforts, Oram frequently invited persons of national reputation to become signatories to some specific promotion. A typical example of these statements is the following communication the AFV Executive sent to Diem in February, 1956:

⁹¹ AFV Treasurer to Harold Oram, Correspondence, 15 June 1956, p. 1., Oram Papers, Indiana University. Indianapolis Archive, A90-39 59/7.

⁹² AFV Treasurer to Harold Oram, Correspondence, 15 June 1956, p.1.

The American Friends of Vietnam, composed of Americans prominent in both major political parties and representatives of all sections of this country, extend our unanimous congratulations for your historic endeavors to build a strong, free and democratic Vietnam. As we have learned from the history of our own Republic, the achievements of democracy and peace require constant vigilance and effort. We are confident that, with your wisdom, courage and experience, you will successfully pilot your state through the highly troubled waters of this period. Our sincerest support and that of the overwhelming majority of the American people are pledged to your success in your task of building a nation committed to freedom, justice and peace.⁹³

As a vehicle for promoting Diem as the effective steward of South Vietnamese independence and development, public statements of support and open letters continued to be employed by Oram and the AFV throughout the Eisenhower administration, often with great success. Elliot Newcomb noted on one occasion that “both the AP and UP have given wide currency here and overseas to [an AFV] story, as well as the Voice of America.”⁹⁴

Another device frequently employed by the AFV to generate significant media coverage was a press conference by one of the organization's prominent leaders. The national reputation of O' Daniel was recognized by Oram as an especially effective instrument in attracting heavy media attention, and transcripts of O'Daniel's press conferences often revealed the partisanship of some members of the press who were dedicated to opposing international communism and advancing American national interests.⁹⁵ Aware of this common purpose, O' Daniel at one AFV press conference stated that, “our press is one of [the] greatest weapons we have against Communism.”⁹⁶ Indeed, O' Daniel and other AFV leaders did their best to entice members of the media to become proponents of the organization's agenda by appealing to the patriotism of journalists already inclined to oppose Communist expansion.

Oram's systematic use of various mechanisms of promotion was based upon a sophisticated understanding of structures and functions of both the mass media and major foreign policy organizations. Dedicated to promoting itself as an authoritative reference source on South Vietnamese affairs, the AFV disseminated a constant, comprehensive and reaffirming supply of material not to dictate media content, but to construct a dominant frame of reference for evaluating South Vietnam and Diem. Oram's public relations efforts offered selected themes of

⁹³ American Friends of Vietnam, “Minutes of the Third Meeting of the Executive Committee of the American Friends of Vietnam,” 14 February 1956, p.2., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 16.

⁹⁴ American Friends of Vietnam, “Minutes of the first meeting of the Executive Committee of the American Friends of Vietnam” 8 December 1955, p.1., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 16.

⁹⁵ Harold L. Oram, American Friends of Vietnam, “Memorandum to His Excellency Tran Van Chuong: Stimulation of American investments in Vietnam,” p.2., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1 Folder 16.

⁹⁶ General John W. O'Daniel, American Friends of Vietnam, “Press Conference on American Friends of Vietnam,” p.6., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 17.

reference until they became the popularly accepted hegemonic perceptions. Ideally, once images of Diem's domestic support and democratic orientation became accepted, the media and members of the foreign policy community would independently evaluate Diem and South Vietnamese events based upon those terms of reference constructed by Oram. Indicative of the firm's success was the near unanimity of opinion within the domestic American media regarding Diem's suitability and viability between 1956 and late 1957.

The most essential aspect of Diem's promotion was to describe him as the one South Vietnamese leader capable of maintaining the South's security and stability. The retention of South Vietnam as an anti-Communist ally was consistently depicted as contingent upon his personal leadership. Moreover, since Diem was said to be the architect and sponsor of all progressive South Vietnamese reforms, he became perceived by American audiences as representative of the South Vietnamese people as a whole. Indicative of this was the dominant misconception among Americans that Buddhist South Vietnam was predominantly Catholic, a conclusion based largely on Diem's heavily reported devotion to the Catholic faith. Delineation between the man and the state became problematic.

Under the guidance of Oram, the AFV sought to define Diem in consistent and reaffirming terms to domestic audiences. With themes calculated to reflect American values, Diem was packaged as a commodity for popular consumption. The AFV's emphasis on Diem's Catholicism permitted the organization to differentiate him from other Asian leaders and to appeal especially to American anti-Communist Catholic constituencies. Diem's personal commitment to American democratic ideals and values was reported to have been a consequence of his exposure to American political culture during his tenure at the Maryknoll seminary, an experience reported by the New York Times as being an "important part in the shaping of the young President."⁹⁷ Echoing the Times' view, America found that Maryknoll profoundly influenced Diem and by extension the State of South Vietnam, as the visit was essential to the "formulation [of] the principles that were to become the Constitution of the Republic of Vietnam."⁹⁸ Portrayed as having been shaped by his exposure to the American experience, Diem was thus cast as a sympathetic protégée struggling to emulate his more successful and established international patron.

The qualities of leadership essential to the maintenance of South Vietnam were accentuated, as, according to AFV member Senator Mike Mansfield, "the fingers which shape

⁹⁷ "Diem Here For a Visit, Relives his Exile at Maryknoll," The New York Times, 13 May 1957, p.1.

⁹⁸ "No Neutrality for Ngo", America, 25 May 1957, p.252.

them before the clay hardens will have much to do with their ultimate forms.”⁹⁹ The newly established independence of the South permitted Oram and the AFV to inject comparisons between the American Founding Fathers and Diem’s government. Indeed, AFV Executive Committee member William Henderson declared to the Council on Foreign Relations that Diem “may be the greatest man in the mid 20th Century, if not the entire century.”¹⁰⁰ Consistently representing Diem as imbued with selfless qualities of hard work, courage, and impeccable integrity permitted the AFV to define Diem’s character in idealized terms. Even Diem’s stubbornness and reluctance to compromise was depicted as a positive and necessary attribute in preserving the South’s independence, as he was reported not to be “the kind of man who can be pressured into any action.”¹⁰¹ Acclamation of Diem’s personal qualities as the foundation of South Vietnam’s success was embraced by the media, as the New York Times praised his reputed qualities of “hard work” and “tenacity of purpose,” and as the Washington Post saluted the “determination and the resources of character of this remarkable man.”¹⁰² Similarly, the Reader’s Digest found that “in the midst of the dark storm that threatens Asia, President Diem stands like a beacon of light, showing the way to free people.”¹⁰³

The AFV frequently emphasized the challenging conditions in South Vietnam after Diem’s inauguration in 1954. The South’s social, economic and political dislocation resulting from the French Indo-China war provided Diem’s advocates with a permissive standard for evaluating the performance and liberalization of his regime. Criticism of the GVN’s activities could be placed within the context of the systemic problems of a newly established nation struggling against insurmountable odds, with limited time and marginal resources. Relatedly, successful programs could be directly attributed to Diem’s personal role as architect and sponsor of the South’s development. Diem’s leadership in accommodating the almost one million refugees from the North, an exodus heavily covered by the American media, was indicative of this approach, as he could be described as saving those people from Communist tyranny, as becoming increasingly popular among an expanding constituency, and as being an able administrator dealing with staggering social and economic burdens. Documenting the South’s hardships during the beginning of Diem’s tenure permitted the AFV to emphasize the lack of resources and influence available to him and the need for his personal qualities and attributes in shaping and maintaining

⁹⁹ Senator Mike Mansfield, “Reprieve in Viet Nam” Harpers Magazine January 1956, p.2., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 17.

¹⁰⁰ William Henderson, American Friends of Vietnam, “Summary of Address by William Henderson - Council on Foreign Relations 15 October 1956 p.2., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 16.

¹⁰¹ Senator Mike Mansfield, “Reprieve in Viet Nam” Harpers Magazine January 1956, p.1., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 17.

¹⁰² “Visitor from Viet-Nam,” The Washington Post, 8 May 1957, p.A16.

¹⁰³ O.K. Armstrong, “Biggest Little Man in Asia,” Reader’s Digest, (February 1956), p.86.

South Vietnam. Thus, Mansfield observed that “in the jungle of colonial decay, corruption, and military defeat which characterized Saigon in 1954, Diem assumed the Presidency with few assets other than his nationalism, his personal incorruptibility and courage, and his idealistic determination.”¹⁰⁴ Observations by Foreign Affairs that upon Diem’s inauguration his early administration was “conceded little chance of survival” and that “the general expectation was that South Viet Nam would quickly succumb to Communist pressures,” reflected the popular thesis that the very survival of the Diem regime represented a triumph of leadership.¹⁰⁵

Consistent with Machiavelli’s position that the essential prerequisite to the creation of a state is the establishment of an appropriate and utilitarian history, Diem’s advocates sought to redefine his initial term in office prior to the showdown with the Sects in April, 1955. Early criticism of Diem’s “helpless, inept” leadership from the American media and government was consistently represented as a reflection of French colonial propaganda that was unwittingly and uncritically accepted by American observers.¹⁰⁶ This marginalization of earlier criticism functioned to defend Diem’s regime while imparting a sense of unfounded cynicism to subsequent negative evaluation of Diem’s performance. Mansfield’s postpartum analysis of Diem’s handling of the Sect Conflict exemplified that process. Countering criticism of Diem’s actions as having been excessively uncompromising, Mansfield reported that the Vietnamese leader had little choice: “He was maneuvering to free himself from the web of corruption and decadence and the vestiges of colonial control in which he had become enmeshed from the moment he assumed the Presidency.” Far from being divisive, Diem, according to Mansfield, created unity among the anti-Communist forces. He “gained the confidence of numerous Vietnamese who had been exploited and degraded by the Binh Xuyen, the sects, and their accomplices among the French *colons*. He gained the respect of free foreign nations - and even of the Communists who recognized that a dangerous opponent had appeared in Saigon.”¹⁰⁷

Diem’s promotion by the American Friends of Vietnam also focused upon his personal role in providing the essential ingredient missing in the failed French opposition to the Viet Minh, an independent nationalist non-Communist leadership. The view of Diem as a viable non-Communist and anti-Colonialist “Third Force” accommodated the dominant conception shared by the American foreign policy community and much of the American public that the crux of the

¹⁰⁴ “No Neutrality for Ngo”, America, p.3.

¹⁰⁵ William Henderson, “South Vietnam Finds Itself”, Foreign Affairs, Jan 1957, p.283-284.

¹⁰⁶ William Henderson, American Friends of Vietnam, “Summary of Address by William Henderson - Council on Foreign Relations, 15 October 1956, p.1., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 17.

¹⁰⁷ Senator Mike Mansfield, American Friends of Vietnam, “Reprieve in Viet Nam” Harpers Magazine January 1956, p.2., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 17.

French failure lay in not supporting genuine South Vietnamese nationalism. French inability to counter Communism in South Vietnam was attributed by the AFV to their attempt to “impose a military solution without granting the necessary additional political ingredient of national independence.” In representing Diem’s regime as a unique and unprecedented expression of nationalism, the AFV introduced a “native government, cautiously coached by the United States, and slowly shedding the last remnant of French colonialism as it would a dirty, threadbare old coat.”¹⁰⁸ Diem’s nationalist, anti-Communist, and anti-Colonialist attributes were roundly praised by members of the media, including the New York Times which welcomed his leadership as a successful “Third Force”, providing the essential alternative to both the Communists and the French.¹⁰⁹ By distinguishing Diem’s regime from earlier unsuccessful South Vietnamese anti-Communist governments and by emphasizing Diem’s willingness to accept American advice, Oram managed to marginalize the French experience as extraneous and immaterial to the future prospects of South Vietnam.

The popularity of Diem and his government in the South was, throughout the Eisenhower administration, an essential element in Diem’s public promotion. According to the dominant American political culture, domestic popular support provided a government with democratic legitimacy, moral virtue and the means to effectively resist communism. American disillusionment with Asian leaders such as Chiang Kai-shek was founded upon their perceived inability to mobilize domestic support beyond that of narrow urban elites. Efforts to depict Diem’s popularity as inclusive of both urban constituents and the masses of agrarian workers distinguished him from other Asian leaders by indicating his consequent ability to challenge the Communists in their traditional areas of support. This image of vitality was supported by members of the media including Life which wrote that Diem had “tried valiantly and at literally risk to his life to prove to the people that he loves them by frequent sorties from his palace in Saigon to towns, villages, and army posts all over South Vietnam.”¹¹⁰ Noting that Diem had “tirelessly toured the countryside” in order to attract supporters away from Ho Chi Minh, a fine example of Western style of campaigning, the New York Times concluded that “practically all of Vietnam’s twelve million inhabitants must feel that they know him personally.”¹¹¹ This supposed overwhelming and spontaneous outpouring of rural support for Diem’s leadership was also covered by Reader’s

¹⁰⁸ William Henderson, American Friends of Vietnam, “Summary of Address by William Henderson - Council on Foreign Relations”, 15 October 1956, p.1., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 17.

¹⁰⁹ “Progress Noted in South Vietnam: Country, Weak and Divided Year Ago, Has Evolved into Sovereign State”, The New York Times, 16 February 1956, p.16.

¹¹⁰ “Tough Miracle Man of Asia”, Life, 13 May 1957, p.157.

¹¹¹ “An Asian Liberator: Ngo Dinh Diem”, The New York Times, 10 May 1957, p.13.

Digest, which reported peasant chants of “Ten Thousand years for our President Diem”,¹¹² and America was convinced that Diem “has a popular following which can no longer be denied.”¹¹³ Intrinsic to this success was Diem’s reputed populism reflective of the American model, which the Washington Post depicted juxtaposing a picture of Diem holding a child during a rally with the caption “A politician is a politician - East or West. And Diem, a practical politician, is constantly out among his people.”¹¹⁴

Another aspect of the AFV’s representation of Diem as a popular and consequently viable leader reflected the dominant American conception of the nature of Communism. Communism was popularly perceived by American audiences to be an alien movement imposed upon indigenous populations by force and the guile of manipulative, self-interested individuals. As an expansive and aggressive force led by the Soviet Union and China, Communism was believed to be neither responsive to local issues nor willingly adopted by people with adequate understandings of their conditions and political choices. Accordingly, American political culture defined true nationalism as incompatible with monolithic international Communism. Against this background, Oram and the AFV described Diem’s nationalism as securely based upon a natural affinity with the South Vietnamese people. Diem’s expulsion of the French was seen as especially important in winning popularity in the South.¹¹⁵ Ho Chi Minh had also opposed the French, but now he faced an even more nationalistic Ngo Dinh Diem, Chief of State of the Free Government in South Vietnam, who could effectively reshape the Vietnamese political environment.¹¹⁶ Newsweek was no less favorable in its evaluation, declaring that “Diem has become the authentic symbol of Vietnamese nationalism.”¹¹⁷

AFV promotion of Diem as a popular national South Vietnamese leader was consistently mindful of Ho. Enjoying international prestige and domestic popularity as the architect of the Viet Minh victory and Vietnamese independence, Ho could seriously challenge Diem’s claims of national support. Diem’s leadership and personal qualities were first reported by the AFV as generating “great personal power in South Viet Nam, comparable to that of Ho Chi Minh in the North,” and then, less defensively, as winning support at the expense of Ho.¹¹⁸ Confident that the

¹¹² O.K. Armstrong, “Biggest Little Man in Asia”, Reader’s Digest, p.82.

¹¹³ “Diem Firmly in the Saddle”, America, 24 March 1956, p.680.

¹¹⁴ “Diem - Symbol of Free New Asia”, The Washington Post, 8 May 1957, p.18.

¹¹⁵ William Henderson, American Friends of Vietnam, “Summary of Address by William Henderson - Council on Foreign Relations, 15 October 1956, p.1., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 17.

¹¹⁶ Senator Mike Mansfield, American Friends of Vietnam, “Reprieve in Viet Nam” Harpers Magazine January 1956, p.1., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 17.

¹¹⁷ Ernest K. Lindley, “A Friend Named Diem”, Newsweek, 20 May 1957, p.40.

¹¹⁸ Lindley, “A Friend Named Diem”, p.4.

South Vietnamese would become increasingly receptive to Diem's nationalist and anti-Communist policies, AFV supporters reported that, "Diem's star is likely to remain in the ascendancy and that of Ho Chi Minh to fade because Diem is following a course which more closely meets the needs and aspirations of the Vietnamese people."¹¹⁹ While conceding the popularity of Ho Chi Minh, Reader's Digest agreed with the Oram campaign that Diem's nationalist orientation far better reflected the aspirations of the South Vietnamese people. The publication portrayed the differences between the two leaders as a choice between "Ngo Dinh Diem and Ho Chi Minh - the first an advocate of constitutional government, the second a Moscow - trained disciple of Stalin."¹²⁰ Along the same lines, the New York Times reported that "Diem has become a symbol of Vietnam's democracy. He ended the anti-Colonial appeal of Ho Chi Minh."¹²¹ The success of Diem's policies in promoting a democratic alternative closely associated with the West suggested that any weakness was short term.

Until late 1957 the AFV consistently maintained that Diem had effectively countered the Communist insurgency in the South. Thanks to the policies of the Diem government, local Communist insurgents, it was reported, were "no longer a serious threat, ...because they were unable to enforce their will on anything that took place in the South."¹²² Interpreting Communist passivity as indicative of successful South Vietnamese government policies, the AFV noted the ability of Diem's government to administer most of its territory despite some outbreaks of violence, a comforting view among Americans unprepared to understand that the potentially strong Communists could be bidding their time. The AFV optimistically reported Diem as "very much in business", able to provide an unprecedented opportunity to counter Asian Communist expansion,¹²³ even to achieve the liberation of the North as part of the "advancement of freedom."¹²⁴ American doubts about their own international credibility and ability to act in Southeast Asia were eased by descriptions of Diem and South Vietnam as foils to international Communism. Indeed, it was hoped that the Communists' "leak of prestige" in Vietnam could "flow over into other states in Southeast Asia now inclined to quiver before Red expansion."¹²⁵ The

¹¹⁹ Lindley, "A Friend Named Diem", p.4.

¹²⁰ O.K. Armstrong, "Biggest Little Man in Asia", Reader's Digest, p.86.

¹²¹ "Diem - Symbol of Free Asia", New York Times, 4 May 1957, p.A18.

¹²² William Henderson, American Friends of Vietnam, "Summary of Address by William Henderson - Council on Foreign Relations, 15 October 1956, p.1., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 17.

¹²³ Henderson, "Summary of Address by William Henderson - Council on Foreign Relations, 15 October 1956, p.1.

¹²⁴ Senator Mike Mansfield, American Friends of Vietnam, "Reprieve in Viet Nam" Harpers Magazine January 1956, p.2., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 17.

¹²⁵ William Randolph Hearst, American Friends of Vietnam, "South Viet Nam Boldly Supports America", New York Journal-America 13 April 1956, American Friends of Vietnam reprint, p.2., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 17.

potency of the South Vietnamese government under the direction of Diem was now widely accepted throughout the media, as Foreign Policy reported that the Diem government was “unchallenged in its control over the whole territory of Vietnam South of the 17th Parallel.” Communist guerrillas were simply “harassed game for the national army.”¹²⁶

Such heady optimism was founded upon the proposition that Diem represented the essential assurance of continued stability in the South. Diem’s proponents sought to define America’s commitment to Vietnam and its peoples as a specific and unequivocal personal commitment to the South Vietnamese President. In evaluating American policy, Senator Mansfield reported that “since the defeat of the French Expeditionary Forces in the great battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, our policy in Viet Nam has supported not merely anti-communism but also Ngo Dinh Diem.”¹²⁷ Ultimately, Diem was personalized as the vessel of American national interest, as the AFV maintained that “the Vietnamese National Army of President Diem is of the first line of defense for the free world in Southeast Asia.”¹²⁸

Representation of Diem in general terms applicable to his leadership and GVN policies was supplemented by a series of narrowly focused promotional campaigns. The construction of general terms of reference was intended to be universally applicable, defining a model for understanding Diem and his government. Specific campaigns, including the South’s importance to American national interests, defense of the Diem regime’s process of democratization and the necessity of developing the South industrially, encouraged support of goals deemed essential to the maintenance of Diem’s leadership and development of his country. Even the specific campaigns, however, continued to be directed towards accommodating Diem’s image with American values and general Cold War aspirations.

The first specific public relations campaign directed by Oram, AFV and the Vietnamese Government was to emphasize the national interests of the United States in Vietnam and, therefore, to Diem’s importance to American foreign policy. The mechanism selected by Oram and the AFV to “educate” the American public regarding the importance of Vietnam was the

¹²⁶ “The Future of Vietnam”, Foreign Policy, 36., (1 November 1956), p.29.

¹²⁷ Senator Mike Mansfield, American Friends of Vietnam, “Reprieve in Viet Nam” Harpers Magazine January 1956, p.2., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 17.

¹²⁸ William Randolph Hearst, American Friends of Vietnam, “South Viet Nam Boldly Supports America”, New York Journal-America 13 April 1956, American Friends of Vietnam Reprint, p.2., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 17.

“Washington Conference”, scheduled for June, 1956.¹²⁹ Oram packaged the event as an “Emergency Conference” providing the opportunity for “outstanding leaders in government, business, labor and religion to bring this crisis to the attention of the American people.”¹³⁰ The presence at the Conference of such influential foreign affairs experts as General John L. O’Daniel, Nicholas Biddle Duke, Leo Cherne, Tom Dooley, Monsignor Edward E. Swanstrom, Joseph Buttinger, Tran Van Chuong, William J. Donovan, Walter Judd, Walter Robertson and John F. Kennedy raised the profile and legitimacy of the AFV and its agenda while providing a powerful indication to the Eisenhower administration of the Lobby’s growing strength and support.

The publicity generated by the Conference facilitated efforts by Diem’s proponents to conduct a comprehensive promotion of both American stakes and interests in South Vietnam and Diem’s role in securing a stable future. Assistant Secretary of State Walter S. Robertson reaffirmed at the meeting that the Eisenhower administration would continue to support the government of Diem, a major commitment to Diem personally that would continue uninterrupted for more than two years.¹³¹ Robertson’s attendance and announcement there of official policy were significant public acknowledgments of the AFV’s prestige, a fact acknowledged by Senator Kennedy when he informed the Conference audience that “I can assure you that the Congress of the United States will give considerable weight to your findings and recommendations.” He then sought to help shape those recommendations with his address, “America’s Stake in Vietnam: The Cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia”¹³²

Regretting the lack of public attention among American audiences towards the South Vietnamese situation, Kennedy offered to explain why Vietnam had “virtually disappeared from the front pages of the American press.”¹³³ Most important was the “amazing success of president Diem in meeting firmly and with great determination the major political and economic crises which had heretofore continually plagued Vietnam.”¹³⁴ Media preferences for conflict and instability to

¹²⁹ American Friends of Vietnam, Program of Activities for the American Friends of Vietnam for the Six Month Period Commencing March 1, 1956,” p.2., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1.

¹³⁰ General John W. O’Daniel, American Friends of Vietnam, “American Friends of Vietnam Correspondence with Mr. Merenoff” p. 1., 26 April 1956, Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 17.

¹³¹ David L. Anderson, Trapped By Success, p.160.

¹³² John F. Kennedy, American Friends of Vietnam, “America’s Stake in Vietnam: The Cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia” Address to the American Friends of Vietnam’s Washington Conference, 1 June 1956, p.1. Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 17.

¹³³ Kennedy, “America’s Stake in Vietnam: The Cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia”, p.1.

¹³³ Kennedy, “America’s Stake in Vietnam: The Cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia”, p.1.

¹³⁴ Kennedy, “America’s Stake in Vietnam: The Cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia”, p.1.

the exclusion of successful and “creative missions of the future” had, according to Kennedy, effectively penalized Diem and South Vietnam for their accomplishments. Relatedly, the Eisenhower administration’s reactive, ad hoc “volunteer fire department” approach to foreign policy was also seen to be a cause of South Vietnam’s obscurity in the American political consciousness, providing Americans with little understanding of their interests and responsibilities in Southeast Asia. Kennedy sadly concluded that the “Vietnamese may find that their devotion to the cause of democracy, and their success in reducing the strength of local Communist groups have had the ironic effect of reducing American support.”¹³⁵

Insisting that South Vietnam represented “the cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia, the keystone of the arch, the finger in the dike”, Kennedy emphasized the essential importance of the South to American national interests. The consequence of South Vietnam’s fall before Communism, he warned, would produce a direct security threat to all of East Asia including Japan, the Philippines and India. Ultimately, according to Kennedy, American interests in the maintenance of the South was a “very selfish one - for it can be measured, in the last analysis, in terms of American lives and American dollars.” Due to the inherent importance of South Vietnam, “any new outbreak of trouble” would necessitate the “inevitable” involvement of the United States to protect its security interests. Indicating that the last Indo-China war had been “more costly, more exhaustive and less conclusive than any war we have ever known”, Kennedy suggested the consequences of American failure in the South while emphasizing the good economics of continuing support to Diem’s government.¹³⁶

Accommodating domestic concerns about America’s international prestige and ability to act in the face of an inherently aggressive Communist monolith, Kennedy represented South Vietnam as a major focus of Communism’s challenge to American interests and credibility. Declaring South Vietnam “a proving ground of democracy”, Kennedy escalated the stakes in the South by suggesting that “if this democratic experiment fails...then weakness not strength, will characterize the meaning of democracy in the minds of still more Asians.”¹³⁷ Describing a democracy under siege, Kennedy introduced the specter of a fledgling nation struggling to maintain itself, dependent upon helpful assistance from the United States:

¹³⁵ Kennedy, “America’s Stake in Vietnam: The Cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia”, p.2.

¹³⁶ Kennedy, “America’s Stake in Vietnam: The Cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia”, p.2

¹³⁷ Kennedy, “America’s Stake in Vietnam: The Cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia”, p.2.

Vietnam represents a test of American responsibility and determination in Asia. If we are not the parents of little Vietnam, then surely we are the godparents. We presided at its birth, we gave assistance to its life, we have helped to shape its future. As French influence in the political, economic and military spheres has declined in Vietnam, American influence has steadily grown. This is our offspring- we cannot abandon it; we cannot ignore its needs. And if it falls victim to any of the perils that threaten its existence - Communism, political anarchy, poverty and the rest - then the United States, with some justification, will be held responsible; and our prestige in Asia will sink to a new low.¹³⁸

Finally, Kennedy emphasized South Vietnam's international standing and social progress in order to nurture impressions of the South's viability and to foster a sense of responsibility among Americans towards a legitimate and respected Free World partner threatened by Communism. Supporting this image, Kennedy reported that, "where once colonialism and Communism struggled for supremacy, a free and independent republic has been proclaimed, recognized by over 40 countries of the Free World." Moreover, "legislation for better labor relations, health protection, working conditions and wages has been completed under the leadership of President Diem."¹³⁹ Depicting South Vietnam as a successful, viable and legitimate member of the Free World helped sell the Diem government as a worthy ally in America's crucial struggle against international Communism.

Kennedy's address was representative of the AFV and GVN's campaign to enhance domestic awareness of the importance of South Vietnam to American national interests. Of particular concern was the "marked decline in American public interest in Vietnam" and "diversion from the critical problem of the survival of South Vietnam."¹⁴⁰ The Committee reported that "in contrast to the tendency toward apathy which characterizes the Western World, the Communists have persistently pushed the Vietnamese situation to the center of their propaganda."¹⁴¹ And, underlying all the promotional and political lobbying activities dedicated to demonstrating the importance of South Vietnam to domestic American audiences was the basic proposition of the Vietnam Lobby that Diem was the only person capable of ensuring the stability and security of the South. His defeat would be synonymous with South Vietnam's.

¹³⁸ Kennedy, "America's Stake in Vietnam: The Cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia", p.2.

¹³⁹ Kennedy, "America's Stake in Vietnam: The Cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia", p.2

¹⁴⁰ American Friends of Vietnam, "Program of Activities for the American Friends of Vietnam for the Six Month Period Commencing March 1, 1956", p.1., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1. ¹⁴⁰ American Friends of Vietnam, "Program of Activities for the American Friends of Vietnam for the Six Month Period Commencing March 1, 1956", p.1.

¹⁴¹ American Friends of Vietnam, "Program of Activities for the American Friends of Vietnam for the Six Month Period Commencing March 1, 1956", p.1.

In their second specifically focused campaign, Oram and the Vietnam Lobby applied themselves to portraying favorably South Vietnam's March 4, 1956, National Assembly elections. Conducted under repressive and authoritarian conditions, the election had secured for Diem ninety of the one hundred twenty-three available assembly seats. Candidates from opposition parties including the Viet Minh were disqualified while seats were disproportionately provided to constituencies favorable to Diem. Recognizing the undemocratic nature of the election, the State Department Intelligence Research Branch wrote that "balloting will not indicate accurately the extent of anti-Diem sentiments, for a number of nationalist leaders, particularly refugees from the North, appear disinclined to risk censure or repression by contesting the election as opposition candidates."¹⁴² Indeed, the State Department had been concerned about the feasibility and desirability of free and fair elections in the South due to the "unpredictable" nature of new democratic Asian countries and fears for a splintered assembly.¹⁴³

The AFV and GVN public relations campaign in support of the Diem regime's conduct of the election thus reflected a dual focus. Promotion of Diem in unqualified terms to general domestic audiences was accompanied by a more circumspect representation of Diem to audiences more knowledgeable about South Vietnam because of their access to critical information available to Asian specialists. O'Daniel's unequivocal message of congratulations concerning the creation of the South's constitution was indicative of the AFV's promotion of Diem to general audiences. During a tour of South Vietnam, O'Daniel publicly complimented Diem:

Your parliamentary approach to the task of drafting a new Constitution is a dramatic indication of your devotion to the cause of freedom. Just as our Founding Fathers faced the gravest of difficulties both external and internal and came through their time of trial to victory, we have confidence that you will lead the great Vietnamese people through uncertain events to a future of peace, democracy and prosperity. We pledge our enthusiastic support and that of the overwhelming majority of the American people for your continued leadership in the service of our common heritage of freedom.¹⁴⁴

Reflecting this emphasis, coverage of the election amongst the American media vindicated Diem's conduct by depicting the election as both an exercise in democracy and a tool for enhancing the popular standing of Diem's government. The Reporter had "little doubt that Ngo Dinh Diem wants to be the father of a democratic country rather than the founder of a dictatorship." Accordingly, the magazine could "find little in either the appearance or the words of

¹⁴² Intelligence Brief Prepared in the Office of Intelligence Research, Department of State, 7 February 1956, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, vol XIII Indochina Part 2, p.638.

¹⁴³ David L. Anderson, Trapped By Success, p.129.

¹⁴⁴ American Friends of Vietnam, Press Release (undated), p. 1., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 17.

President Diem to indicate that the king has awakened in him.”¹⁴⁵ The New York Times reported in March, 1956, that democratic rights had been respected”, that Diem had a popular mandate , and that the “new constituent assembly [could] draft an organic law for the country with the just claim that it [had] the support of the people.”¹⁴⁶ The 86.4% support given to Diem’s candidates according to Time, represented a “landslide victory for President Ngo Dinh Diem’s national Revolutionary Movement.” Despite the electoral restrictions placed on the opposition, the magazine assured its readers that “the election was no mere formality.” Indeed, Time agreed with the many other publications that “the most telling sign of Diem’s increased strength was the Communists failure to make a threatening show of force.”¹⁴⁷

South Vietnam’s new Constitution was also popularly acclaimed by members of the American mass media. Accepting the overwhelming power invested in the executive as an inevitable consequence of the South’s troubled circumstances, including the challenge from the North,¹⁴⁸ the New York Times emphasized the Constitution’s basic commitment that “every Vietnamese citizen is assured of the right to life, liberty, security and the integrity of his person”, as well as freedom of speech, press and assembly.¹⁴⁹ Similarly, the Reporter sympathetically asked, “How could he [Diem] introduce all the freedoms so long taken for granted in countries like the United States and Britain?”¹⁵⁰ Indeed the Washington Post endorsed the Constitution as a “relatively liberal document” which “nonetheless takes a realistic view of South Viet Nam’s weakened national condition and the internal and external Communist threat to its security.” Moreover the imbalance between South Vietnam’s executive and legislative powers was characterized simply as more reflective of the American than the French model.¹⁵¹ And, quoting “seasoned Western observers” as having concluded that after “weighing the pros and cons in the case for and against Diem’s South Vietnam”, “that Diem was moving in the right direction and that [his] shortcomings in democracy were a necessity at the time,” the New York Times dismissed flaws in administration of the South as a function of time and circumstance.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁵ Darrell Berrigan, “The Ordeal of South Vietnam”, The Reporter, 20 September 1956, p.30.

¹⁴⁶ “Election in Vietnam,” The New York Times, 5 March 1956, p.22.

¹⁴⁷ “South Viet Nam: Victory for Diem”, Time, 19 March 1956, p. 1:5.

¹⁴⁸ “Vietnam Charter Fortifies Regime: New Constitution will give President Broad Powers during Critical Period”, The New York Times, 6 July 1956, p.8.

¹⁴⁹ “Vietnam: Charter Near: Draft Drawn up by Assembly Now Goes to Parliament”, The New York Times, 5 July 1956, p.25.

¹⁵⁰ Darrell Berrigan, “The Ordeal of South Vietnam,” The Reporter, 20 September 1956, p.29.

¹⁵¹ “Law of the Land,” Time, 16 July 1956, p.30.

¹⁵² “Diem Gives Indochina a more Hopeful Look: His South Vietnam Republic moves next to Adopt a Constitution,” The New York Times, 11 March 1956, p.4.

AFV Executive Committee member William Henderson was more circumspect, however, in speaking to the Council on Foreign Relations, as he described the South Vietnamese government's efforts to force the withdrawal of opposition candidates "unwholesome behavior for a nation that calls itself a democracy."¹⁵³ But, having found fault with the conduct of the electoral process, Henderson qualified his criticism with references to special South Vietnamese conditions and to the need to achieve a greater good. Despite the abuse of opposition candidates, the Constituent Assembly provided "machinery that reflected some degree of popular will and, as far as that goes, the Assembly is an honest body." Opposition candidates were marginalized in Henderson's address as self-serving, unrepresentative and ineffectual, as he "suggested that those "arbitrarily dealt with by the Government were in the main personally ambitious individuals and had the special interests of the sects more in mind than the general welfare." These opposition candidates were also shown to be primarily members of South Vietnam's intellectual community who held obstructionist and anti-American sentiments.¹⁵⁴

Henderson's speech represented an early shift in the promotion of Diem to accommodate the rising tension between his publicly generated image and South Vietnamese events. While the Vietnamese leader was promoted in unqualified terms to domestic audiences as successful, liberal and supportive of American interests, qualified criticism of Diem's regime before more knowledgeable audiences would increasingly become a defensive strategy of Oram's campaign. The role of these groups in influencing attitudes and policy toward South Vietnam made them an essential element in Diem's promotion; however, their awareness of South Vietnamese events required adoption of less simplistic public relations campaigns. Confronting evidence of abuses in South Vietnam, the Vietnam Lobby consistently conducted a program of qualifying and marginalizing criticism of the regime. Indicative of this trend was Henderson's depiction of opposition candidates as unrepresentative, self-serving, obstructive and anti-American. Framing evaluation of Diem's repression in these terms muted domestic opposition to Diem's actions, as the alternative was shown to be less palatable. Diem's imperfections were acceptable in order to achieve the greater good of effective government working in close cooperation with the United States.

¹⁵³ William Henderson, American Friends of Vietnam, "Summary of Address by William Henderson - Council on Foreign Relations, 15 October 1956, p.2., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 17. ¹⁵³ Henderson, "Summary of Address by William Henderson - Council on Foreign Relations, 15 October 1956, p.3.

¹⁵⁴ Henderson, "Summary of Address by William Henderson - Council on Foreign Relations, 15 October 1956, p.3.

Oram's emphasis upon undermining the critical evaluations of the Diem regime and marginalizing South Vietnamese opposition members found ready acceptance among media sources. The Reporter presented accusations of civil and political repression in South Vietnam as products of rumor and exaggeration and described the South's opposition members as "men who were suckled on power politics" and who often had "saddle sores from long years of riding the political fence." The journal depicted these figures as isolated "with only such power as the individual members can claim through a tradition of regional control."¹⁵⁵ Individually, prominent opposition members were often belittled, as illustrated by Life magazine's description of Dr. Phan Quang Dan as a "pudgy" and "twinkly" man whose support, mostly from the Sects, was likely to "evaporate."¹⁵⁶ Representing opposition candidates in these terms reinforced Diem's reputation while effectively countering criticisms of the regime's slow process of democratization.

The Vietnam Lobby's next major promotion of Diem and the South's cause extended beyond questions of global politics and Vietnamese political institutions to issues considered essential to South Vietnam's economic development. Awareness within Diem's regime that the Commercial Import Program (CIP) had contributed to an artificial prosperity persuaded Diem to seek public and private American financing for infrastructure and industrial development. Diem wrote in the summer of 1956 to the AFV indicating that "current American aid, even [though] generous, perpetuated dependence", and "hampered the country's economic development" by perpetuating its agrarian economy.¹⁵⁷ Citing the close relationship between industrialization and the continued viability of the South, Diem indicated that "we are confronted with the major problem of how to achieve a measure of industrial development in order to give meaning to the political structure we are in the process of erecting. We can survive as a nation only with a measure of industrial development commensurate with our resources and reasonable requirements."¹⁵⁸ Diem's appeal to the AFV for support in promoting South Vietnam's industrialization was enthusiastically received by the organization, which rapidly implemented yet another special campaign.¹⁵⁹

Diem's direct participation in economic public relations initiatives was unique to the relationship between himself and Oram and the Vietnam Lobby. At no other time during the

¹⁵⁵ Darrel Berrigan, "The Ordeal of South Vietnam," The Reporter, 20 September 1956, p.29.

¹⁵⁶ J. Osbourne, "Tough Miracle Man of Vietnam," Life, 13 May 1957, p.157.

¹⁵⁷ American Friends of Vietnam, Draft of an Address for Ngo Dinh Diem on Industrialization and American Aid, (undated), p.1., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 16.

¹⁵⁸ American Friends of Vietnam, Draft of an Address for Ngo Dinh Diem on Industrialization and American Aid, p.1.

¹⁵⁹ Harold L. Oram, American Friends of Vietnam, "Memorandum to His Excellency Tran Van Chuong: Stimulation of American Investments." p.1., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 16.

Eisenhower administration did Diem participate so actively in his own promotion, since he was usually content to help manage affairs through his Washington embassy. Diem's economic initiatives also represented an important repositioning of AFV activities as the organization shifted "from general support of the Diem regime and the necessary continued support of its military power to a support of the fundamentals of building up the country."¹⁶⁰ Earlier public relations success in defining Diem to domestic audiences allowed this shift in emphasis and permitted application of a strategy both utilizing and enhancing Diem's public image. Oram's promotion of the economic initiative linked Diem's public persona to the campaign, affiliating his reputed qualities of independence, hard work and progressive reform with the purposes of the economic program. Inversely, the public relations campaign was structured to enhance Diem's image as architect and sponsor of economic development in ways consistent with American values and interests.

During October, 1956, the AFV actively sought to redefine itself in accordance with its new mandate as "heretofore we have been concerned primarily with the political struggle for survival, [whereas] the economic needs of Vietnam are equally, if not more, important."¹⁶¹ The AFV, in conjunction with Oram, sought to attract new members with "relevant backgrounds" as "unfortunately, our experts are experts in the political and refugee fields."¹⁶² Lacking the resources to promote the industrial and private investment ideas suggested by Diem, the AFV turned to the State Department for assistance, especially since the Department had already urged that foreign investment be promoted to "undercut the very popular and successful thesis and propaganda theme that U.S. Government assistance to under-developed countries is merely a cover for Yankee traders."¹⁶³ Aware that the Department of State was "itself emphasizing the private capital investment approach", the AFV sought promotional research materials regarding economic surveys, investor profiles, labor evaluations, credit opportunities and monetary exchanges all for a proposed economic conference.¹⁶⁴ The Department of State, according to

¹⁶⁰ AFV Treasurer to Harold Oram, Correspondence, 15 June 1956, p. 3., Oram Papers, A90-39 59/7.

¹⁶¹ Harold L. Oram, American Friends of Vietnam, "Memorandum to His Excellency Tran Van Chuong: Stimulation of American Investments." p.1., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 16.

¹⁶² AFV Treasurer correspondence with Harold Oram, Correspondence, (undated) p.2., Oram Papers, A90-39 59/7.

¹⁶³ Memorandum from the Deputy Director Plans, Central Intelligence Agency (Weisner) to the Assistant Secretary of State Far Eastern Affairs (Robertson), 27 September 1956, Foreign Relations of the United States:1955-1957. Vol.1 Vietnam, p.742.

¹⁶⁴ Minutes of Meeting of the Executive Committee, American Friends of Vietnam, 12 November 1956, p.2., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 17.

Harold Oram, agreed “to provide the AFVN with all the unclassified reports and material on Vietnam’s economic conditions, as well as a list of American firms with interests in Vietnam.”¹⁶⁵

The AFV’s promotion of South Vietnam’s industrial development and private foreign investment initiatives were heavily influenced by Diem, as he sought to define the terms and focus of the campaign. Diem’s presentation of himself as committed to creating a favorable investment climate reflected more than concern for economic development, since representing that development in terms of a market driven, free enterprise system served to indicate close adherence to the predominant economic values of American audiences. Also, paradoxically, in order to assure generous American governmental assistance, Diem and his promoters needed to depict South Vietnam as receptive to private investment as a means of reducing its dependence upon American aid. That aid, while essential to the South’s economy, also represented an influential mechanism for securing Diem’s position domestically. Earlier programs, crafted by Mansfield and the Eisenhower administration in October 1954, had positioned Diem as the sole conduit for assistance in order to assure his political survival. Oram’s economic campaign thus reflected a complex interaction of motives including Diem’s ambition, the South’s economic development, and American economic values and political purposes.

Earlier promotion of Diem by Senator Mansfield suggested Diem’s supposed fear that American aid could be “harmful if it serves to stifle energies by building unnecessary reliance on this country. Diem is not the kind of man who has removed his country’s dependence on one foreign country only to shift it to another.”¹⁶⁶ Diem was also depicted as a responsible and effective administrator of aid. “Before the Diem government came to power, American aid was probably more ineffective in Viet Nam than anywhere else in the world. It is now a positive asset.”¹⁶⁷ Complementing these earlier images, Oram and the AFV sought to facilitate Diem’s desire to present himself as dedicated to fostering a favorable climate for private investment. Diem wrote to the AFV, promising to create a “favorable climate for economic development through fiscal policies encouraging capital formation and providing incentives to private enterprise, be it domestic or foreign.” Nationalization was rejected by Diem as were any other forms of “economic discrimination.”¹⁶⁸ Additionally, protection of commercial and industrial property rights

¹⁶⁵ Harold L. Oram, American Friends of Vietnam, “Memorandum to His Excellency Tran Van Chuong: Campaign to Further Vietnam’s Economic Development”, 30 October 1956, p.1., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 16.

¹⁶⁶ Senator Mike Mansfield, American Friends of Vietnam, “Reprieve in Viet Nam” Harpers Magazine January 1956, p.1., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 17.

¹⁶⁷ Mansfield, “Reprieve in Viet Nam”, p.5.

¹⁶⁸ Oram Draft of an Economic Address for Ngo Dinh Diem, American Friends of Vietnam, n.d., p.1., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 17.

was supported, including adherence to international reciprocal property rights agreements. His commitment to tax concessions, the easing of import customs and licensing, and reducing obstructive administrative procedures were all incorporated into the AFV's usual campaign of article placement, reprints, and hosting of press conferences. And the AFV's usual ability to secure coverage throughout the mainstream media included the New York Times, which carried Diem's warning of "dependence upon the state at the expense of private individuals" and his admonition that "all initiative must come from private individuals."¹⁶⁹

To help sell its campaign to industrialize the South, Oram and AFV Executive Committee members introduced the menace of North Vietnam. Recognizing the potential challenge of economic prosperity in the North, the AFV Executive committed itself to "a fundamental shift in emphasis from the establishment of a political regime [in the South] to the general economic and social development of the country, in competition with the developments in North Vietnam."¹⁷⁰ Applying all of its mechanisms of promotion, the AFV and GVN, under Oram guidance, sought to generate perceptions of the South's economic development as vital to American national interests. The AFV's program emphasizing the competition being waged between the two competing economic systems was reflected in an April 1, 1957, editorial from Le Figaro which the organization heavily reprinted. According to the article, the Soviet Union and Red China had provided two billion dollars, skilled workers, infrastructure development and modern factories to the North promising the creation of "semi-industrialized North Viet Nam [which] will emerge beside an agricultural South." The involvement of the USSR and Red China indicated that "they probably intend to work out some sort of "window display surprise" for the admiration of the peoples of Southeast Asia. They perhaps contemplate making North Viet Nam a model of industrial progress for the Asian countries which might decide to choose an alliance with the Communist Powers."¹⁷¹ Complementary AFV promotions sought to reinforce the impression that American assistance was capable of countering the Communist challenge in the North. A Hearst press article covering an AFV press conference, an article entitled "Vietnam Showdown with the Reds", reflected this focus and was subsequently reprinted by the organization. The article reported that the "American Friends of Vietnam believe that the U.S. can, and must, meet this new Communist challenge on

¹⁶⁹ American Friends of Vietnam, "Vietnam President Invites Private Capital Investment: President Ngo, in Address to First Session, Stresses Vietnam's Free Efforts," The New York Times 7 October 1957, reprinted by the American Friends of Vietnam, 8 October 1957, Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 15, Folder 3.

¹⁷⁰ AFV Treasurer correspondence with Harold Oram, American Friends of Vietnam, Friday-undated, p.2., Oram Papers, A90-39 59/7.

¹⁷¹ Tibor Mende, International Rescue Committee, "Communists pour Millions Into North Vietnam In Race To Build Southeast Asian Showcase," Le Figero, undated, reprinted by the American Friends of Vietnam, 1 April 1957, Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 15, Folder 3.

the economic front - a front on which we are particularly suited to act."¹⁷² Representing North Vietnam's industrialization as a consequence of Soviet and Red Chinese ambition to create a "showcase" for the Communist economic model, the article depicted the issue of the South's development as a direct challenge to the international appeal of the Free World's economic system.

The ability of Oram and the AFV to shift their objectives from promotion of Diem to the South's economic development was a function of the program's earlier success in selling Diem to domestic audiences. The economic development campaign reshaped the AFV program, "not in terms, a la [Tom] Dooley, of the problems of the past" but into a more complex promotion of Diem and South Vietnam."¹⁷³ Diem's representation as the coordinator and facilitator of industrial development and private investment imparted his prestige, legitimacy and public persona to the program, while he in return achieved improved visibility as a champion of the free market and opponent of aid dependence. Promotion of North Vietnam's development as a "showcase" of communism for the region escalated the South's industrial development into a matter of vital American national interests and defined economic assistance as the appropriate response. As the sole national leadership candidate perceived to be capable of maintaining the South's security and stability, Diem's position was thus effectively reinforced by any increase of America's economic commitment to South Vietnam. Additionally, "the enthusiastic, though unofficial support" of key State Department officials such as Kenneth Young and Paul Kattenburg during the economic development campaign developed relationships and avenues of communication which remained in effect throughout the remainder of the Eisenhower administration, convincing members of the AFV of their considerable influence on American foreign policy.

The AFV's economic initiative also attracted the attention of the mainstream media. The New York Times covered the inauguration of the AFV's economic program to attract foreign private investment by evaluating the incentives to potential investors and by suggesting that development and prosperity represented a challenge in which "the loyalty of the Vietnamese people is the prize."¹⁷⁴ Echoing the Times position, Foreign Policy reported that "the pressures of new needs and of permanent human aspirations for a meaningful and better life will increasingly

¹⁷² William Randolph Hearst, International Rescue Committee, "Vietnam Faces Showdown: Election Deadline Near," Hearst Newspapers, 8 July 1956 reprinted by the American Friends of Vietnam, undated, p.3., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 15, Folder 3.

¹⁷³ AFV Treasurer to Harold Oram, Correspondence, 15 June 1956, p. 3., Oram Papers, A90-39 59/7.

¹⁷⁴ "Vietnam Sets Lures for U.S. Investment," The New York Times, 16 March 1957, p.28.

assert themselves" in Vietnam and that "vigorous efforts could rapidly transform South Vietnam into one of the Free World's greatest successes in Asia."¹⁷⁵

The ability of the AFV and GVN under Oram tutelage to consistently represent Diem in favorable terms of reference had by mid - 1957 produced a public context positive enough to inspire a national American tour by the Vietnamese leader. General and specific promotions by Diem's proponents appear to have succeeded in establishing a hegemonic model providing standard frameworks for understanding both Diem and South Vietnam. This ability to project the issue of Diem's leadership into the forefront of American foreign policy debate, despite few changes in either the South Vietnamese situation or the Diem government's policies regarding liberalization and democratization, reflected the influence of Diem's promotion. Scheduled for May, 1957, Diem's national tour reaffirmed his general images of merit and viability while providing a visible platform for introducing new aspects to his promotion. As a public relations and political lobbying mechanism, Diem's tour was an unqualified success, enhancing Diem's prestige through heavy media coverage reflective of Oram's promotional campaigns.

General endorsement by the American media and foreign policy community of Diem's image as a successful and essential Asian leader reflective of American interests in the region was embraced by the Eisenhower administration, as was the nearly unanimous endorsement of Diem's continued leadership of the South amongst Senate and Congressional Asian Affairs experts. Sharing the basic predilection to retain Ngo Dinh Diem, and determined to maintain the support of influential foreign affairs experts, the administration enthusiastically participated in promoting Diem to American audiences during his May, 1957, tour, despite significant flaws in the Diem government's performance. Orchestrated in Oram's offices, the May tour represented the pinnacle of the firms' ability to synthesize diverse agendas and interests amongst the American media, public, foreign affairs experts and Eisenhower administration into a comprehensive selling of Diem.

Both the Eisenhower administration and the State Department recognized the promotional potential of Diem's 1957 tour in terms of fostering support among domestic audiences, and State Department correspondence between Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, Walter

¹⁷⁵ "The Future of Vietnam," Foreign Policy, 1 November 1956, p.32.

S. Robertson, and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles reflected an awareness that Diem believed such a visit would greatly enhance his prestige in both North and South Vietnam and Southeast Asia generally.¹⁷⁶ Having been largely inactive in previous public relations support of Diem and his government, Eisenhower used personal diplomacy during Diem's visit to publicly emphasize South Vietnam's favor with the administration as a Free World partner. Displays of protocol earlier bestowed upon Asian and African leaders such as Habib Bourguiba, King Saud, and Jawaharla Neru following the Suez Crisis, facilitated a high profile endorsement of Diem by the administration. Eisenhower's new approach included providing Diem with the Presidential plane "Columbine" and meeting the South Vietnamese leader personally at the airport. Frequent public statements were also issued by Eisenhower as a means of indicating Diem's favor with the administration. Toasting Diem upon his arrival, Eisenhower declared that Diem had "in a very short space of time established himself as an inspirational leader in his own country."¹⁷⁷ Moreover, "by his courage, his fortitude and his statesmanship, he has become an example for people everywhere who hate tyranny and love freedom."¹⁷⁸ These public displays of admiration imparted an unequivocal message of support for Diem easily recognized and well amplified by the mass media. Time, recognizing the implications of the trip, announced that "Ike's invitation to make an official state visit was a triumph almost as great as Viet Nam's freedom is a shining vindication of U.S. foreign policies."¹⁷⁹ Eisenhower's policy of personal diplomacy was also not lost on the New York Times as it reported on the "unusual honor of a personal greeting on [Diem's] arrival at National Airport."¹⁸⁰ The newspaper also detailed the administration's extension of favorable protocol as an indication of "the depth of the Administration's liking for him and what he has done."¹⁸¹

The congruency between official policy and the Vietnam Lobby's agenda permitted implementation of a cooperative and comprehensive promotional campaign. The administration provided Diem access to Eisenhower, John Foster Dulles, other major State Department and Defense Department members - all highly visible symbols of the respect afforded to Diem and the

¹⁷⁶ Memorandum From the Acting Secretary of State to the President , 6 March 1957, Foreign Relations of the United States:1955-1957. Vol.1 Vietnam, p.765.

¹⁷⁷ "Remarks of Welcome to Ngo Dinh Diem, President of Viet- Nam, at the Washington National Airport," 8 May 1957, Papers of President Eisenhower – 1957, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1963), p.334.

¹⁷⁸ "Toasts of the President and President Diem of Viet-Nam," 8 May 1957, Papers of President Eisenhower – 1957, p.334.

¹⁷⁹ "The Nation: Foreign Aid Repaid," Time, 20 May 1957, p.17.

¹⁸⁰ "Diem's Visit Tied to Aid Program: Vietnam Chief Due in Capital Wednesday - His Success Cited by Policy Makers," The New York Times, 6 May 1957, p.16.

¹⁸¹ "Eisenhower Greet's Vietnam's President, Extols Patriotism," The New York Times, 9 May 1957, p.16.

South Vietnamese Government. Furthermore, official support for Diem was not restricted to the Executive branch as Diem was invited to address a joint session of Congress, a high profile publicly popular demonstration of solidarity between the executive and the legislative branches of government. Meanwhile, assisted by its associations with prominent members of Congress, the media, and business, the AFV under Oram guidance sought to complement governmental promotions with an additional itinerary of tours, meetings and parades, structured to represent national support for Diem as broad based and largely unchallenged.

Choreographing Diem's visit, Oram and the AFV organized a private meeting between Diem and John D. and David Rockefeller, an address to the National Press Club, and a special mass offered by Cardinal Spellman and Joseph F. Flannenelly, the Auxiliary Bishop of New York, who stated that, "the entire world acclaimed [Diem] him when this God-fearing, anti-Communist and courageous statesman saved Vietnam."¹⁸² Also scheduled on his trip was a return to his former seminary (Maryknoll), visits to Detroit manufacturing plants, Tennessee Valley Authority sites, and Los Angeles petroleum plants. Honorary degrees from Michigan State University and Seaton Hall University were bestowed upon Diem; indeed, Seaton's President proclaimed that Diem "more than anyone else, stopped the Communists in their hour of partial conquest of Viet Nam. Had Viet Nam fallen to them, as seemed inevitable in July of 1954, the communistic empire would have harvested huge economic, strategic and political advantages."¹⁸³ As a consequence of these convocations some publications like the New York Times began to refer to Diem as Dr. Ngo, without qualifying his degree as honorary.¹⁸⁴

A ticker tape parade held in New York hosted by Mayor Robert F. Wagner was also included on Diem's itinerary, providing an effective illustration of the prestige and popularity of Diem within both official and popular audiences. During the parade, Wagner extended his unqualified praise to Diem "to whom freedom is the very breath of life itself." The address attributed the miracle of the South's continued security directly to Diem, as "a man history may yet adjudge as one of the great figures of the twentieth century."¹⁸⁵

Oram organized the International Rescue Committee, the American Friends of Vietnam and the Council on Foreign Relations to host a dinner and awards presentation celebrating Diem's

¹⁸² "Diem, Here for Visit, Relives his Exile at Maryknoll" The New York Times, 13 May 1957, p.7.

¹⁸³ "Diem, Here for Visit, Relives his Exile at Maryknoll" The New York Times, p.7.

¹⁸⁴ "Vietnam Rebirth Credited to U.S. Dr. Ngo Says Millions in Aid Helped Create One of the Most Stable Countries in Asia", The New York Times, 15 May 1957, p.1.

¹⁸⁵ "Diem, Here for Visit, Relives his Exile at Maryknoll" The New York Times, 13 May 1957, p.7.

commitment to freedom and opposition to Communism. In a mass mailing appealing for attendance at the dinner, Henry Luce declared:

President Ngo Dinh Diem is one of the great statesmen of Asia and of the world. He has held back the flood of Communism which threatened to engulf his country. He has represented in Southeast Asia that conviction common to all free men that freedom is worth every sacrifice. In 1953 he was in our country briefly as a political exile; he now returns to be welcomed as the leader of his people who are our allies. In honoring him, we pay tribute to the eternal values which all free men everywhere are prepared to defend with their lives.¹⁸⁶

Intended to generate widespread media coverage in a display of solidarity and support for Diem, the dinner was used to bestow the first annual Admiral Byrd Memorial Award “for leadership in the cause of freedom” to the South Vietnamese President.¹⁸⁷ As the “unanimous selection” of the Directors of the International Rescue Committee, Diem was enthusiastically praised:

It is to the eternal credit of President Diem that, by his faith in freedom, his courage and his personal integrity, he has been able, in the brief time that has intervened since Geneva, to weld together his nation, to restore its shattered economy, to resettle the refugees, to firmly establish democratic institutions, and to give his people a sense of pride and spiritual unity. In accomplishing these things, President Ngo Dinh Diem has made Viet Nam a beacon of freedom for the whole of Asia. It is to such a man that we humbly and gratefully present an award which is meaningful to all Americans and, indeed, to free men everywhere.¹⁸⁸

The AFV-IRC dinner was representative of Oram’s program of manufacturing media events focused on Diem’s accomplishments and attributes. Although drawing mostly upon the resources of the AFV’s membership and affiliated Oram clients, the dinner gave an impression of widespread support for Diem and received significant media coverage.

Oram’s role as Diem’s public relations representative included management of media coverage, press conferences, preparation for media questioning and speech writing. AFV members and supporters provided a wealth of specialized knowledge of South Vietnamese and domestic American issues as they authored Diem’s speeches, tailoring them to reflect selected themes and audiences. Harold Oram’s correspondence with Wolf Ladejnski outlined the requirements of Diem’s speeches for delivery to the Far East-American Council of Commerce and Industry, the National Press Club, and the Joint Session of Congress. For speeches addressing

¹⁸⁶ Henry R. Luce, American Friends of Vietnam, “Invitation to a Dinner in Honor of Ngo Dinh Diem”, 24 October 1957, p.1., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 18.

¹⁸⁷ Angier Biddle Duke, American Friends of Vietnam, “The Admiral Byrd Memorial Award”, p.1., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 18.

¹⁸⁸ Duke, “The Admiral Byrd Memorial Award”, p.1.

South Vietnamese administrative and economic developments, Oram enlisted the help of expert authors such as Wesley Fishel and AFV National Committee member, Sol Sanders.¹⁸⁹

A speech entitled “Viet Nam Sets Its Course”, written by Oram for Diem’s visit, reflected the major themes that the GVN and the Vietnam Lobby wished to emphasize regarding South Vietnam’s development. The speech addressed traditional issues such as the South’s economic development compared to the North’s, while incorporating new themes of democratic development and South Vietnam’s role in opposing the neutralist movement. Written as a personal address from Diem, the speech recalled South Vietnam’s “unification” and the achievement of “political stability, internal security, and national independence” under Diem’s leadership. At a time when criticisms of the government’s democratic and human rights record were occasionally given coverage, Oram’s speech indirectly addressed those issues and defended such shortcomings as a function of time, culture, and the Communist menace. The address indicated that South Vietnam’s democratic development depended heavily on adequate security. According to Diem’s speech, national security was an essential prerequisite to any democratization since “without security the people cannot participate fully in self-government. Before there can be self-government, there must be government.”¹⁹⁰ National security was said to be challenged by the South’s “exposed position” when the North continued to “constitute a latent menace for Free Vietnam.”¹⁹¹ Representing the South’s poor record of democratization in these terms used the threat of Communist encroachment to excuse authoritarian policies as conditional and unavoidable.

Democracy was also described by Oram as an alien process unfamiliar to the people of South Vietnam. Dependence upon a centralized authority was shown to be a consequence of tradition, for historical disenfranchisement of the South Vietnamese had, according to Diem’s address, “corrupted the sense of civil responsibility in the minds of many Vietnamese. We are confronted, therefore, with nothing less than the restoration of the spirit of public service, of honor and of national dignity, of sacrifice, of discipline and personal responsibility, of courtesy in human relations, which is simply the impression of respect for others as for oneself.”¹⁹² The foundation for democratic development was shown to be a social and cultural process as “democracy is a

¹⁸⁹ Wolf Ladejinski, Ladejinski, “Memorandum to Harold L. Oram”, 25 April 1957, p.1., Oram Papers, A90-39 35/10.

¹⁹⁰ Ladejinski, “Viet Nam Sets Its Course” Oram Draft Manuscript under Diem’s byline intended for publication in *Foreign Affairs*, p.2., Oram Papers, A90-39 35/10.

¹⁹¹ Ladejinski, “Viet Nam Sets Its Course”, p.4.

¹⁹² Ladejinski, “Viet Nam Sets Its Course”, p.15.

moral system which will develop gradually as the concept of the common will becomes, day-by-day, implanted in the minds of the citizens as well as of the governing.”¹⁹³

Democracy itself was re-conceptualized in accordance with Diem's newly established model. Conceived by Diem as a hybrid between Western democratic systems and local conditions and institutions native to South Vietnam, his model of democracy was said to more accurately reflect national and historical needs. Accommodating Diem's position that his democratic philosophy sought to reduce inequalities rather than impose egalitarianism, the speech reported that “democracy to our way of thinking is not a collection of texts and laws drafted and executed. It is essentially a state of mind, a continuous process of self-education, and the art of fusing into a synthesis the diversity of conceptions typical of a free society.... Above all, it means a system which will provide the optimum conditions for the full development of human personality.”¹⁹⁴

Depicting the South's slow democratization within the framework of security requirements and shallow democratic tradition and culture permitted Oram and the AFV to indirectly address criticisms while qualifying them as unrealistic and potentially dangerous. The speech's embrace of Diem's personal model of democracy founded upon an amalgamation of Western models with native traditions and conditions provided a valuable vehicle for countering criticism of the regime. Criticism of the Diem government's political conduct and civil rights record could now be seen as based on tensions between an alien ethnocentric standard of democracy and an indigenous model potentially more reflective of the citizenry's desires and national conditions.

The speech also covered the issue of South Vietnam's economic development. According to the address, the current stability that the South was experiencing as a consequence of political and military consolidation was challenged by the requirement to develop economically in response to domestic aspirations and the challenge of the North's industrialization. Soviet and Red Chinese sponsorship of North Vietnam necessitated a complementary program of development as, “only then will Free Viet Nam be in a position to meet successfully the Communist offensive in the field they have chosen - at least for the time being - the economic field.” Economic prosperity was also shown to provide the basis for attracting domestic support to the regime at the expense of the Communists while generating a closer association with the West. Diem indicated that economic reform and progress allowed an affiliation which “shall harness the

¹⁹³ Ladejinski, “Viet Nam Sets Its Course”, p.15.

¹⁹⁴ Ladejinski, “Viet Nam Sets Its Course”, p.15.

rising aspirations of our people for the good of Viet Nam and for the good of the Free World.”¹⁹⁵ Domestic economic development based upon the principals of private property, capitalism and the free market were represented as effective instruments in undermining Communist support among rural populations. “We intend to eliminate the danger of Communism in rural Viet Nam”, Diem concluded, “by strengthening the concept of private property where it has been weakest, at the base of the social pyramid.”¹⁹⁶

The economic focus of the speech also defined Diem as a proponent of reducing the South’s dependence upon American aid and establishing a favorable investment climate for private American financing. Declaring that South Vietnam “must stand on its own feet”, the address pledged Diem’s dedication to policies that would permit “our dependence upon American Aid to gradually come to an end.”¹⁹⁷ But this image of the Diem regime actively pursuing policies designed to reduce foreign aid dependence was combined with gratitude to the American government and people for their assistance in securing South Vietnam’s independence. The stability of the South was reportedly secured in “large measure because it had at its disposal the support of the United States.”¹⁹⁸ Whether the recipient of private investment or governmental aid, Diem presented himself as a grateful representative of American interests and values in Southeast Asia.

The selection of these economic themes were carefully scripted. South Vietnamese industrial development was an issue of concern to the Diem regime and the Vietnam Lobby. Depicting Diem as the proponent of the market economy, private investment and reduction of dependence upon American assistance addressed divisions within Congress and the American public over the continued extension of current international aid levels. Defining Diem as progressive, dedicated to democracy and private enterprise, packaged him in American cultural values. And, campaigns to maintain the current aid levels to South Vietnam reinforced Diem’s position among Americans as he was viewed as the sole conduit for American dollars and the most reliable person to preside over the South’s economic growth.

The address also introduced a new and essential feature in the promotion of Diem: depicting him as a regional advocate of association with the United States and opponent of both Communist and neutralist influences in Southeast Asia. Based upon his apparent success in

¹⁹⁵ Ladejinski, “Viet Nam Sets Its Course”, p.16.

¹⁹⁶ Ladejinski, “Viet Nam Sets Its Course”, p.6.

¹⁹⁷ Ladejinski, “Viet Nam Sets Its Course”, p.4-5.

¹⁹⁸ Ladejinski, “Viet Nam Sets Its Course”, p.10.

Vietnam, Diem was described as a potent partner against “the common enemy”.¹⁹⁹ American concern with the rise of neutralism in Southeast Asia permitted Diem and his proponents to co-opt the issue on his government’s behalf. Oram’s speech proclaimed South Vietnam’s unconditional opposition to neutralism - a regime under Diem’s leadership which had “rejected neutralism for reasons both of principle and of national interest. We doubt the wisdom as well as the virtue of trusting those to coexist peacefully with us whose aim - openly avowed, repeatedly demonstrated, and too often achieved - has been the destruction of liberties, spiritual values and dignities which raise man above the animal level and give meaning to his life.” The address also dedicated Diem to enhancing Southeast Asia’s regional solidarity as part of the Free World by encouraging a “common market” that would favorably influence social, political and economic development. And further extending the potential role of Diem as a sponsor of regional affiliation, Oram included in the speech a commitment by the South Vietnamese leader to establishing a regional collective security organization, necessitated by the Soviet - Chinese “persistent strategy to subvert our institutions.”²⁰⁰ Conceptualized as an interim force intended to defend its membership until the mobilization of United Nations power, the regional defense initiative was intended to appeal to Americans who sought allies in battling “international Communism.”

Diem's address, “Viet Nam Sets Its Course”, effectively illustrated the evolving themes and programs of Oram and the Vietnam Lobby in accommodating Diem with American perceptions of their national interests and domestic politics. Coverage of Diem’s distinct democratic philosophy was included within the mass media’s evaluation of the South’s process of democratization. The New York Times had earlier endorsed his philosophical model, noting that it was “...not surprising that a firm concept of human rights should come from a man of erudition fully steeped in the French and American applications of this concept.” Indeed, the newspaper declared that Diem’s vision was quite compatible with the work of America’s Founding Fathers, a vision with which “Thomas Jefferson would have no quarrel.”²⁰¹ Criticism of the regime was frequently qualified in light of Vietnamese conditions. The Washington Post noted the South’s record of arrests, censorship, and flawed democratic processes, but concluded that “the chaotic conditions in the disrupted country have excused some of the methods.”²⁰²

Diem’s anti-neutralist stance was also not lost on members of the media as America confirmed that among regional leaders “none have been so forthcoming on Communism and Cold

¹⁹⁹ Ladejinski, “Viet Nam Sets Its Course”, p.11.

²⁰⁰ Ladejinski, “Viet Nam Sets Its Course”, p.14.

²⁰¹ “Diem on Democracy,” The New York Times, 12 March 1957, p..

²⁰² “Visitor from Viet-Nam,” The Washington Post, 8 May 1957, p.16.

- War neutralism. In contrast to their nervous tightrope posturing on these issues, President Ngo left no doubt that he stands with the Free World."²⁰³ Reflecting this theme, Life praised Diem's rejection of "Nehru's neutralism."²⁰⁴ Diem's pledge "that he would try to bring the Free countries of Asia more closely together in combating Communist military forces and subversion" was reported by the New York Times, which had earlier covered Diem's stated objective of organizing a Southeast Asian "common market" as a mechanism for unifying the region through increased trade and interdependence.²⁰⁵ "In effect", the Times concluded, "President Diem's address amounted to a justification of United States aid for the vulnerable free nations of Asia before a Congress that is in the mood to cut back assistance programs." America agreed: "We shall have to spend more if the country is to remain a symbol of democracy in Communist - threatened Southeast Asia. We feel confident that the American people will judge President Eisenhower's case on such Cold War realities rather than on 'cut the budget' sloganizing."²⁰⁶

Diem's May 1957 tour proved to be the culmination of promotional activities in support of his leadership in the United States. Defined in specific terms for selected audiences, the trip garnered immense coverage generating approximately 8,000 news articles. Amongst the flurry of favorable articles were stories entitled "Tough Miracle Man of Asia", "An Asian Liberator: Ngo Dinh Diem", "Man from Vietnam... that Nation's Symbol of Independence"²⁰⁷, "Diem's Success Story"²⁰⁸, "Red Carpet for Mr. Diem"²⁰⁹, and "A Friend Named Diem"²¹⁰, among a litany of others.

Oram's evaluation of the tour for the South Vietnamese government reported that, of the 300 newspaper and magazine editorials, all were favorable except one which was mildly critical of civil liberties violations, but "nevertheless urged continued American support through aid and diplomacy."²¹¹ The effect of the tour, according to Oram, resulted in media coverage across "the broadest conceivable political spectrum from the ultra conservative National Review to the highly liberal New Republic as well as all the shades of liberal and conservative opinion between these

²⁰³ "No Neutrality for Ngo," America, 25 May 1957, p.251.

²⁰⁴ J. Osborne, "Tough Miracle Man of Vietnam," Life, 13 May 1957, p.172.

²⁰⁵ "Eisenhower and Diem Cite Red Peril to Asian Peace: South Vietnam Chief gets Assurance of U.S. Aid to meet Communist Military Build - Up and 'Continuing Subversion'," The New York Times, 12 May 1957, p.1:6.

²⁰⁶ "No Neutrality for Ngo," America, 25 May 1957, p.252.

²⁰⁷ "Man from Vietnam: President Diem, Arriving Here for a Visit, is that Nation's Symbol of Independence," The New York Times Magazine, 5 May 1957, p.6:25.

²⁰⁸ "Diem's Success Story," The New Republic, 6 May 1957, p.5.

²⁰⁹ "Red Carpet for Mr. Diem," U S News, 17 May 1957, p.20.

²¹⁰ Ernest K. Lindley, Newsweek, 20 May 1957, p.40.

²¹¹ Gilbert Jonas, American Friends of Vietnam, "Memorandum to Mr. Nguyen Phu Duc First Secretary of the Embassy of Vietnam", 24 April 1958, p.2., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 17.

two poles. This constituted a totally unprecedented U.S. public opinion reaction towards a foreign country, especially an Asian country. Radio, television and newsreel coverage was equally favorable and universal."²¹²

The ability of the Vietnam Lobby and the South Vietnamese government, under the direction of Oram, to construct a hegemonic frame of reference was apparent from the inclusion of Oram's promotional themes into the mass media's general consensus between mid 1955 and late 1957. Providing the two essential ingredients of media campaigns, quantity and quality, Oram's effort helped secure favorable coverage among a wide diversity of popular publications. Seeking to subtly define the framework of discussion, Oram's success did not come from dictating the terms of media coverage, but rather in tailoring AFV messages to the predominant conceptions of the media. Favorable media coverage of South Vietnamese events, such as the South's national election and development of a Constitution, were a function of both the Lobby's specific public relations promotions and its ability to inspire the media to generate its own coverage reflecting Oram's agenda. Transformed were the earlier images of Diem's government as inept and overwhelmed; the stumbling "Beleaguered Man" gave way to the optimistic and dynamic "Tough Miracle Man of Asia."²¹³ Ultimately, the greatest strength of Diem's public relations campaign lay in its ability to manufacture a common framework for evaluating Diem and his government at a time when alternative sources of information about Vietnam were almost nonexistent.

The success of Diem's proponents in generating popular and bipartisan support for enhanced American commitments to the South helped maintain pressure on an administration distracted by other things. Some marginalization of the South Vietnamese cause within the administration was attributable to Eisenhower's September 1955 heart attack and John Foster Dulles' diagnosis with abdominal cancer in 1956, both of which significantly limited the administration's vitality and willingness to respond to events not in a state of crisis. Accordingly, as the administration confronted the problems of Quemoy and Matsu, Suez, and Hungary, policy towards South Vietnam was left mostly to senior members of the State Department such as Walter Robertson, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, and Kenneth Young, in charge of the Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs. As early supporters of Diem's

²¹²Jonas, "Memorandum to Mr. Nguyen Phu Duc First Secretary of the Embassy of Vietnam", 24 April 1958, p.2.

²¹³ "Beleaguered Man", *Time*, 4 April 1955, p.22.

leadership, Robertson and Young's involvement ensured the American Friends of Vietnam a sympathetic hearing. Despite so little attention from Eisenhower and Dulles, an environment was being created and political attachments gradually forged that would facilitate much deeper American involvement in Vietnam once Diem's fortunes began to decline.

End of the Miracle Man

The previous success of the Vietnam Lobby and the Government of Vietnam in defining Diem in favorable terms to selected audiences had resulted in a broad consensus of support for his leadership. This idealized public relations construct was, however, ultimately problematic to the selling of Diem, as it both implied that the South's difficulties had been surmounted and established an artificial standard for evaluating Diem's subsequent policies and actions. By the end of the Eisenhower administration, none of the mainstream publications suggested removing Diem or installing alternative leadership, but they began to insist on fundamental South Vietnamese reforms in order to better secure the South in opposition to Communism. Time reflected this position in 1960, reporting that "We have no alternative. There is no solid opposition, no agitating students, no organized army leaders. The only alternative to Diem is communism. We cannot abandon him, but he must bring in reform."²¹⁴ Critical evaluations of Diem involving issues of civil liberties, electoral irregularities, and a lack of domestic popular support were typically included even within generally appreciative examinations of his role in leading the South through difficult times. Following Diem's May, 1957, tour of the United States, media evaluation of his leadership and government gradually deteriorated both in quality and quantity of coverage, a process influenced by unfavorable South Vietnamese domestic developments and by deteriorating working relationships between Diem and his American supporters.

Earlier depictions of Diem, based upon his success in securing the South economically, militarily and politically continued to provide a basic orientation to media coverage. His role in overcoming Hinh and the Sects, settling the refugees from the North, establishing a National Assembly and Constitution, and developing the South's economy continued to be included in surveys of both Diem's leadership and South Vietnamese conditions. Coverage of Diem's role as a regional anti-Communist and anti-neutralist also received heavy coverage. Embarking upon an ambitious series of state visits, Diem traveled to Thailand, India, South Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia (for the Bandung Conference), and Taipei. The American media approved Diem's close association with the United States and endorsed his regional diplomacy.²¹⁵ However, despite such positive observations, serious doubts began to arise.

²¹⁴ "Problem of One Man," Time, 11 July 1960, p.38.

²¹⁵ "Saigon and Manila," The New York Times, 28 March 1958, p.24.

The carefully crafted associations between Diem and the successful conduct of the American aid program in South Vietnam were fundamentally challenged in the years following his American tour. By late 1957, media reports noted South Vietnam's "stagnant economic situation", questioned "glowing pictures of progress and reform", and urged examination of the "other side of the picture."²¹⁶ The New York Times also attributed the continued lack of private investment in South Vietnam to the Diem government's "extreme centralization of government."²¹⁷ Media criticism of the aid program peaked in 1959, with serious charges of waste and corruption in the American aid program, charges which fundamentally challenged Diem's public image and credibility. Oram and AFV responses in the form of press conferences and press releases received some media attention. A New York Times article reported on Diem's stated commitment to raise export earnings and reduce the South's dependency upon American assistance so the South could "begin to pay its own way"²¹⁸, and the Foreign Policy Bulletin advised that continued assistance was "indispensable to the country's survival and, on the whole, was planned and administered with considerable skill and success."²¹⁹ But, despite the ability of Oram and the Vietnam Lobby to secure some coverage in support of Diem's economic administration including a rudimentary land reform program, the general tenor of the media's position on the American aid program remained skeptical throughout the last years of the Eisenhower administration.²²⁰

Another problem for the Vietnam Lobby was that South Vietnam's 1959 national election was perceived by the American media as evidence of the Diem regime's authoritarianism. Reports of electoral and civil repression moved Time to conclude that, "pleading the Communist threat, Diem has ruled with rigged elections, a muzzled press, and political re-education camps that now hold 30,000."²²¹ This repression was recognized by the World Today as problematic to the South Vietnamese government, as Diem was said to "prefer to maintain the facade of democracy. Consequently, he is judged by the standards of democracy and is found wanting."²²² The New York Times also noted the repression of opposition candidates complaining that, "the Diem government keeps tight control of the press and of all opposition groups. Even political

²¹⁶ "Vietnam Economy Termed stagnant: U.S. Aid Officials Concerned Over Development Lag-Call For Reappraisal," The New York Times, 4 November 1957, p.47.

²¹⁷ "Vietnam Economy Termed stagnant: U.S. Aid Officials Concerned Over Development Lag-Call For Reappraisal," The New York Times, p.47.

²¹⁸ "Saigon Planning Big Export Gain: President Hopes an Output Rise Will Cut Vietnamese Dependency on U.S. Aid," The New York Times, 3 July 1958, p.3.

²¹⁹ Ralph Lee Smith, "South Vietnam: A Success Story," Foreign Policy Bulletin, July 1959, p.158.

²²⁰ "Farm Aide Hails Vietnamese Gains: Ladejinski reports Marked Progress in the Southern Areas Reform Program," The New York Times, 25 October 1959, p.4.

²²¹ "South Viet Nam: Revolts At Dawn," Time, 21 November 1960, p.47.

²²² P.J. Honey, "The Problem of Democracy in Vietnam", World Today, 16 February 1960, p.77.

organizations that are clearly non-Communist have a difficult time."²²³ As a group, however, South Vietnamese non-Communist opposition members continued to be represented in terms compatible with Oram's emphasis on marginalization and trivialization. They were shown to be principally intellectuals tainted by colonialism, men of limited abilities or administrative experience, lacking any "mass following," motivated by self-interest, and ultimately likely to destabilize the South in the face of the Communist threat.²²⁴ This dismissal of opposition members was echoed by Pacific Affairs which determined that the "most obvious characteristic of the national opposition are its weakness and fragmentation."²²⁵

Media attention to the Diem regime's violations of civil liberties following Diem's American tour focused upon his use of the secret police, mass arrests, arbitrary imprisonment of non-Communist opposition members and media censorship. The closed family nature of the Diem government also generated escalating criticism, especially the influence of Diem's brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu. As the head of the Can Lao, or the National Revolutionary Movement, South Vietnam's 70,000 member secret party in support of the Ngo family, Nhu and his wife attracted considerable attention. The Can Lao was reported within the American media to be a society hidden within government, founded upon a personal commitment to Diem and his philosophy of personalism. Membership in the Can Lao was alleged to be required for contracts or promotion within government, resulting in corruption in "high places."²²⁶

The American media also began to report on the developing Communist insurgency in the South. Diem's anti-Communist activities, including arrests, executions and renunciation campaigns, sponsored a growing armed Communist opposition to his regime. The South's Communist insurgency was officially inaugurated in May, 1959, with North Vietnam's declaration of support for reunification using all appropriate means, and the inability of the army of South Vietnam to counter this new offensive was becoming increasingly apparent by early 1960. Events like the Viet Cong's rout of a numerically superior South Vietnamese regional defense headquarters at Tay Ninh, in January, 1960, accentuated both the fragility of the South's military and the growing alienation of the people of South Vietnam from the Diem regime.

²²³ "Dictatorial Rule in Saigon Charges: New Vietnamese Party calls Ngo's Regime Corrupt- Asks Wide Reforms," The New York Times, 1 May 1960, p.1.

²²⁴ "Dictatorial Rule in Saigon Charges: New Vietnamese Party calls Ngo's Regime Corrupt - Asks Wide Reforms," The New York Times, p.1. and "Criticism Rising In South Vietnam; President Ngo Is Denounced As Dictatorial But Regime's Control Seems Strong," The New York Times, 22 May 1960, p.4.

²²⁵ Robert G. Scigliano, "Political Parties in South Vietnam under the Republic", Pacific Affairs, June 1960, p.342.

²²⁶ "Problem of One Man," Time, 11 July 1960, p.38.

This growing alienation began to be attributed to Diem's personal aloofness, described as "neither the desire nor the ability to be a folksy man of the people", and to his authoritarian style of government. Reflecting the media's awareness that Diem's repressive policies in the South were affecting his domestic following was a media report in 1960 indicating that, "in the six years that Ngo Dinh Diem has kept his firm hold on South Vietnam his rigid nationalism has made him almost as disliked by his patriotic countrymen as his ardent anti-Communism has made him disliked by the Communists to the North."²²⁷ Media attention and coverage of Diem's lack of domestic popularity undermined earlier Oram and AFV public relation constructs, increasingly imparting to American audiences counter-images of questionable GVN legitimacy and viability.

Throughout Eisenhower's administration, media coverage continued to represent Diem as the sole leadership candidate capable of maintaining the South's stability, a view shared by the American government. Accordingly, the mainstream media never promoted the removal of Diem, but sought instead to sponsor reform through his administration.²²⁸ But, despite this basic support, the idealized image of Diem developed fractures, as members of the foreign policy community, particularly liberals who had traditionally received sanitized information on South Vietnam through Oram and the AFV, became confronted with the reality of Diem's administration. American Ambassador to South Vietnam Elbridge Durbrow recognized in 1959 the consequence of this clash between the initial idealism of American advocates and the unchanging nature of the GVN. Durbrow wrote in December, 1959, that, "In the flush of enthusiasm over the Diem Government's victory in 1955, both Americans and local intellectuals may have been led to disillusionment when the iron of its authority failed to disappear, but the change in attitude largely occurred among the observers, while the real nature of the regime remained approximately the same."²²⁹

The success of Diem's May, 1957, tour of the United States in generating overwhelmingly positive coverage throughout the American mass media both enhanced his popular image in the United States and prepared the way for future trouble. The ability of Oram and the Vietnam Lobby to construct an idealized caricature of Diem as an unqualified success introduced the potential for overselling both his leadership and the entire South Vietnamese cause. Ambassador Elbridge Durbrow indicated to the Department of State Diem's concern in the wake of the tour that Americans perceived his regime as having accomplished its goals and overcome its challenges.

²²⁷ "Ngo's Firm Rule Irritated Many: Tyranny Charged In Recent Manifesto- President Succeeds Emperor," *The New York Times*, 11 November 1960, p.8.

²²⁸ "Failure of a Coup," *The New York Times*, 13 November 1960, p.4/10.

²²⁹ "Dispatch From the Ambassador In Vietnam (Durbrow) to the Department of State", 7 December 1959, *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1958-1960. Vol.1. Vietnam*, p.257.

According to Durbrow, "Diem himself has indirectly pointed out these problems, by stating to me and others on several occasions that, while everyone in the United States seems to believe that he has performed a miracle in the past three years, they also seem to feel that all of Vietnam's basic problems have been solved." This perception minimized an essential component in the extension of American aid, the fear of danger from economic weakness and consequent vulnerability to Communist resurgence. Durbrow reported to the State Department that Diem "has pleaded with me to try to correct this erroneous impression since there are many problems ahead which may be more difficult than those in the past."²³⁰

Oram activities following Diem's tour focused upon addressing the increasing tension between the constructed image of Diem and the sobering realities of South Vietnam. Media coverage of civil liberties violations in the South was being included in publications which had earlier supported Diem's regime and its activities. The apparent success of the "Diem miracle" in the South in overcoming the Communist challenge allowed the American media to examine the schism between Diem's image as a democrat committed to personal freedoms with the reality of his leadership. Oram's role from late 1957 until the end of the Eisenhower administration thus dwelt less upon proactive promotions than reactive and increasingly ineffective damage control necessitated by a growing domestic awareness of South Vietnamese conditions. Throughout this period Oram and the Vietnam Lobby sought to influence Diem's regime to adopt reformist policies reflective of its own public promotion, and the Eisenhower administration and the State Department also became more involved in the Diem regime's public relations as Oram's reduced effectiveness became apparent.

Gilbert Jonas produced a memorandum for the First Secretary of the Washington Embassy of Vietnam, on April 24, 1958, a communication that sought to convey to Diem's government an understanding of the shifting political climate within the United States concerning South Vietnam and the necessity of adopting reforms conducive to more favorable public relations. Revealing Oram's usual media sophistication, the memorandum emphasized two principal public relation campaign challenges. The first was an attempt to distinguish Diem from other Asian leaders in the minds of the American public, to avoid a "guilt by association" founded upon a "historical tendency of Americans to stereotype their thinking on foreign policy issues." Of particular concern to the campaign were liberals who represented an essential political base of support for South Vietnam and who "have tended to categorize President Ngo in the same grouping as Chiang Kai-shek." Oram reported that "it has only been with the utmost difficulty that

²³⁰ "Dispatch from the Ambassador in Vietnam (Durbrow) to the Department of State, 5 December 1957," Foreign Relations of the United States: 1958-1960. Vol.1. Vietnam, p.870.

we have managed to overcome this form of syllogism, and our main weapon has been essentially a truthful repetition of the facts relating to President Ngo's policies and successes."²³¹ The second focus of Oram's public relations campaign and the major point of the memorandum was the issue of increased media coverage of civil liberties violations in the South.

Jonas reported that critical articles in the media were not yet systemic, "but viewed over a span of time, and a relatively short span of time at that, they seem to indicate a growing trend of American concern for the status of civil liberties in Vietnam."²³² Reported civil liberties violations included the arbitrary arrest of intellectuals and opposition politicians, electoral irregularities, and the general development of a police state. The memorandum reminded the GVN of the consequence of previous favorable media coverage in defining the terms of debate surrounding Diem and South Vietnam. According to Jonas, "The growing number of articles and editorial comment demonstrating concern for these subjects indicates that such concern in the United States will continue to increase and not diminish, especially as the military dangers to the survival of Vietnam seem to diminish. Thus, Americans who would normally tend to relax their critical judgment on this subject during a military crisis would, in more peaceful situations, tend to become more penetrating and more demanding."²³³

The memorandum reported to the South Vietnamese government that negative coverage of Diem and the GVN was being included within publications that had traditionally been early and staunch supporters of Diem. Individual articles were evaluated as were their publishers' historically close affiliations with the promotion of Diem. Negative material in Life, a publication traditionally supportive of Diem's leadership, was cited to indicate the dangerous scope of the criticism. Henry Luce, the publisher of Time, Life, and Fortune, was identified as the chair of the AFV dinner in celebration of Diem during his 1957 tour and as a long-term "advocate of President Ngo and the Republic of Vietnam."²³⁴ Also included in Jonas' evaluation was an article by the New Leader which further illustrated the aversion and disaffection traditional supporters of the Diem regime were now directing toward the GVN's conduct. The New Leader was reported to the South Vietnamese embassy as having "long been regarded as a friend of Vietnam and of President Ngo...one of the first to publish strong articles urging U.S. support of President Ngo in

²³¹ Gilbert Jonas, American Friends of Vietnam, "Memorandum to Mr. Nguyen Phu Duc First Secretary of the Embassy of Vietnam", 24 April 1958, p3., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 17.

²³² Jonas, "Memorandum to Mr. Nguyen Phu Duc First Secretary of the Embassy of Vietnam", 24 April 1958, p.18.

²³³ Jonas, "Memorandum to Mr. Nguyen Phu Duc First Secretary of the Embassy of Vietnam", 24 April 1958, p.19.

²³⁴ Jonas, "Memorandum to Mr. Nguyen Phu Duc First Secretary of the Embassy of Vietnam", 24 April 1958, p.8.

1954 and 1955.”²³⁵ The function of Jonas’ analysis was to represent to the South Vietnamese government the severity of their public relations problem as criticism of the regime was no longer confined to peripheral publications, but now came from traditional supporters of the regime, as a consequence of disaffection with GVN policies.

Evaluation of the influence and readership of selected publications which included critical material on Diem and the GVN were also provided by Oram to the South Vietnamese embassy. Of particular concern to Oram were those publications enjoying select readerships influential in the foreign policy-making process rather than segments of the mass media which were perceived to follow the lead of specialized and authoritative journals. Jonas discounted a July, 1957, critical article in the Socialist Call as “this article received very little attention except among a small group of Socialist leaders in the United States who carry very little political influence in the American scene.” And even critical material in Life was not viewed as extremely serious, despite its circulation of six million, due to the few members of the “decision-making levels of American society” who were included in the publication’s readership.²³⁶

The impact of a March, 1957, Pacific Affairs article critical of Diem and the GVN was deemed to be far more significant. The readership of the journal was reported to be between “three or four thousand scholars and specialists on contemporary Asia in the United States,” and according to Jonas, “many of these readers are in a position to further influence American public opinion as intellectuals, scholars, writers and journalists.”²³⁷ Another important journal publishing critical material was the Reporter, which was reputed to have a liberal readership of approximately 125,000. Jonas described it “as very authoritative on national and international issues, and of all the journalistic periodicals it is probably the most influential among the opinion-molding and decision-making circles of both parties...especially among Eisenhower Republicans.”²³⁸ Further to the left, was the New Republic that addressed an “audience which is ever ready to take up the cudgels on civil liberties.” Serving over twenty-seven thousand readers, principally within the liberal wing of the Democratic party, the New Republic appealed to an essential constituency in foreign policy and one which had traditionally “supported President Ngo with considerable enthusiasm.” And, Oram also evaluated the New Leader as essential to the promotion of Diem

²³⁵ Jonas, “Memorandum to Mr. Nguyen Phu Duc First Secretary of the Embassy of Vietnam”, 24 April 1958, p.15.

²³⁶ Jonas, “Memorandum to Mr. Nguyen Phu Duc First Secretary of the Embassy of Vietnam”, 24 April 1958, p.4.

²³⁷ Jonas, “Memorandum to Mr. Nguyen Phu Duc First Secretary of the Embassy of Vietnam”, 24 April 1958, p.8.

²³⁸ Jonas, “Memorandum to Mr. Nguyen Phu Duc First Secretary of the Embassy of Vietnam”, 24 April 1958, p.16.

and the GVN, as it “is broadly read by many of the important opinion-makers and decision-makers of conservative and liberal views in both the Republican and Democratic parties.” As a consequence of its critical article, Oram warned that, “there is no doubt that the readership of The New Leader, which could accurately be characterized as friendly, will hold their friendship in greater doubt.... The few initial reactions we have received from readers of this article indicate expressions of alarm from an important segment of Americans whom we have counted as friends since 1955.”²³⁹

Jonas’ evaluation of the relative influences and impact of the respective publications reflected both Oram’s awareness of the hierarchical nature of the opinion-making process and the firm’s calculated selection of forums and audiences for the promotion of Diem and the GVN. As the critical coverage of the Diem regime’s repression of civil liberties escalated, Oram thus concentrated its attention on the journalistic “vanguard” of policy formation and opinion making. According to Jonas:

With the exemption of Life Magazine, all the publications involved appeal to a relatively small group of readers from the liberal and non-Communist left. As stated before, however this is precisely the segment of American society whose political interests indicate a concern for the level of internal democracy in other countries. They are almost always in the vanguard of American public opinion as well as decision-makers on the national level, [and] it is only a question of time when mass American public concern will catch up to the concern of this relatively small intellectual minority.²⁴⁰

Oram’s evaluation for the GVN of the growth of critical media coverage represented an attempt by the public relations firm to encourage domestic South Vietnamese reforms and to establish bilateral avenues of communication with Diem and his government. Jonas indicated that while Americans did not expect South Vietnam immediately to become a Western type democracy, “most Americans do expect that American assistance will provide an impetus in the direction of greater democracy or democratic institutions”:

Certain specific guideposts are employed by most Americans to measure how successfully a given country is moving in the direction of greater democracy. As may be inferred from the above report, these guideposts include: freedom of the press, freedom from censorship, freedom of assembly, free trade unions, due process of law, equal treatment before the law, the degree of arbitrary power exercised by the Executive, the degree of involvement of the civilian police in the daily affairs of the people, free elections, the existence and the degree of free expression of responsible opposition parties to the

²³⁹ Jonas, “Memorandum to Mr. Nguyen Phu Duc First Secretary of the Embassy of Vietnam”, 24 April 1958, p.16.

²⁴⁰ Jonas, “Memorandum to Mr. Nguyen Phu Duc First Secretary of the Embassy of Vietnam”, 24 April 1958, p.20.

party in power, etc. These are the main criteria for evaluating the status of democracy and civil liberties in Vietnam as far as Americans are concerned.²⁴¹

Efforts by Oram and the Vietnam Lobby to sponsor domestic South Vietnamese reforms represented an essential part of their promotional campaign from late 1957 until the end of the Eisenhower administration, a course Oram and the AFV considered particularly essential after liberal gains in the 1958 American Congressional elections. Those elections were perceived by Oram as changing the dynamics of the American political landscape regarding foreign policy. The strength of the liberal majority in both Houses, according to Oram, gave "greater receptivity to the concept of foreign aid for economic development and technical assistance,"²⁴² and the shifting political climate also dramatically elevated the importance of South Vietnam's civil liberties and its process of democratization, as these issues were "almost always the prime concern of the liberals and non-Communist left in this country."²⁴³

Supplementing Oram's appeal to Diem and the GVN to adopt reformist policies was advice to develop and implement a public affairs and media relations program within South Vietnam. Traditional promotional activities in support of Diem were continued in the United States, but the deterioration of media coverage forced Oram to introduce a supplementary program within South Vietnam in an attempt to moderate the flow of negative articles. Based upon a sophisticated understanding of the American mass media, this new effort was intended to influence both the content of media material and the quantity of coverage, countering a trend of declining media attention.

Oram's campaign to develop South Vietnam's public relations infrastructure was outlined in November, 1958, by Jonas, who sought ways to ease growing tensions between the American media's lofty expectations and Diem's tough policies. More influence of news at its source, in Vietnam, seemed to be a wise idea:

In respect to the daily or weekly press which has permanent or traveling representatives in Vietnam, the main source of influence and control must inevitably be in Saigon. Very little pressure can be exercised here, except on the general editorial policy, which may on occasion result in the suppression of an unfavorable piece by a regional correspondent, although the American journalistic practice is generally the contrary. The reports of the Time-Life man are generally negative, for example, but the editorial people here exercise

²⁴¹ Jonas, "Memorandum to Mr. Nguyen Phu Duc First Secretary of the Embassy of Vietnam", 24 April 1958, p.19.

²⁴² Gilbert Jonas, Ladejinski, Memorandum to Wolf Ladejinski, 19 November 1960, p.10., Oram Papers, A90-39, 35/9.

²⁴³ Gilbert Jonas, American Friends of Vietnam, "Memorandum to Mr. Nguyen Phu Duc First Secretary of the Embassy of Vietnam", 24 April 1958, p4., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 17.

highly selective judgment in what they actually print. Ultimately, of course, good public relations can only result from good policies in Saigon. It is impossible to suppress permanently unfavorable reports when the objective situation warrants such reports, because the American press cannot be bribed or controlled as a whole. Thus the Government is often obliged to choose between policies regarded as necessary in Saigon but the results of which may be precarious domestically.²⁴⁴

Jonas analyzed the structure of the American media's activities in South Vietnam prior to prescribing processes to accommodate them. Media presence in South Vietnam was shown to be limited to major publications and news-wire services. Differences in the dedication of resources to covering the South also imparted differing levels of familiarity and knowledge of the situation in Saigon. Jonas reported that the only media sources supporting full time correspondents in the South were AP, UPI and Time-Life. Specific writers for the New York Times, the Reporter, Newsweek and McGraw Hill-Business Week acted as regional roving reporters covering an area ranging from Japan to India. Those roving journalists were thought to visit Vietnam infrequently and, thereby missing important news events, were forced to limit their coverage (based on interviews with top officials) to general summaries of the South Vietnamese situation. Another segment of correspondents, according to Jonas, were touring reporters who visited less often than roving reporters and traditionally had less even information on the South.²⁴⁵

Oram's comprehensive South Vietnamese public relations initiative was intended to both rescue the South from its classification by the Overseas Press Club as a "press shy country" and to integrate the GVN into the information gathering process of the American media.²⁴⁶ Restructuring the relationship between the correspondents in Saigon and the GVN was the first objective of Oram's program. Traditional government hindrance of journalists was shown to have resulted in "a highly negative reaction", as "good public relations dictates that the job of the correspondent be made easier by the appropriate government officials." The prescribed approach was to "facilitate the gathering of news in every positive way." This assistance included timing news breaks to accommodate journalists, providing full texts of speeches in advance, and extending resources to assist in the gathering of material including expenses for trips, transportation and photographers. Provisions for training government personnel to assist in "the gathering of news for permanent and visiting journalist" were also supported.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ Gilbert Jonas, Memorandum to Wolf Ladejinski, 19 November 1960, p.4., Oram Papers, A90-39, 35/9.

²⁴⁵ Jonas, Memorandum to Wolf Ladejinski, 19 November 1960, p.3.

²⁴⁶ Jonas, Memorandum to Wolf Ladejinski, 19 November 1960, p.4.

²⁴⁷ Gilbert Jonas, Ladejinski, Memorandum to Wolf Ladejinski, 19 November 1960, p.5., Oram Papers, A90-39, 35/9.

Correspondents from influential media sources like the New York Times or the Washington Post were, according to Oram, to be provided with exclusive interviews with Diem or other members of his government. It was recognized that these interviews represented “in itself a news event” and a means to provide the reporter with an “overall historical perspective for his articles, rather than a small slice that is usually unbalanced.” South Vietnamese personnel were also instructed to continually seek out stories which would reflect favorably on the conduct and policies of Diem and his government. Issues to be accentuated “like the progress of women (always a natural)” and other domestic reforms and programs were specifically identified.²⁴⁸

Meanwhile, in the United States, the media’s dependence upon Vietnam material authored by individuals perceived as authoritative became increasingly problematic to Oram’s promotion. Jonas reported that while “the periodicals prefer to have articles by authoritative persons..., we face the very grave problem of not having more than a few ‘authoritative’ writers in the States, and only a few of these are politically reliable.”²⁴⁹ His evaluation was largely critical of the principal authors in South Vietnam (Bernard Fall, Ellen Hammer, George Mosely and David Hotham) and included negative reference to their productivity and perceived “judgment.” Domestically, authoritative authors favorable to Diem and the GVN were found to be limited to Joseph Buttinger, Wesley Fishel, General O’Daniel, and Milton Sacks, who were all reported to have limited time to produce material for the media. Jonas’ response was the hiring a staff writer for the AFV, whose “ job would be to produce more stuff under the bylines of such people as O’Daniel, Cherne, Duke, etc....and produce suggested drafts and memos for our more authoritative friends.”²⁵⁰ Ghost writing would permit Oram readily to produce and disseminate its promotional material under the legitimizing by-lines of its nominal authors.

Oram’s concern for the production of favorable material also generated a policy to “develop more adherents among writers” and to “assist those already qualified to get some more writing done.” GVN subsidies, including materials, transportation and expenses, were to be extended to those deemed “reliable experts.” The “risks” associated with this program were to be offset by careful evaluation of the individuals involved, as Jonas reported that “we can extrapolate from the general political viewpoint of most writers how they will react in Vietnam with reasonable accuracy.”²⁵¹ Specific authors were identified as unacceptable for the proposed two week press junkets to Vietnam because of their critical coverage of Diem and his regime.

²⁴⁸ Jonas, Memorandum to Wolf Ladejinski, 19 November 1960, p.5.

²⁴⁹ Jonas, Memorandum to Wolf Ladejinski, 19 November 1960, p.5.

²⁵⁰ Jonas, Memorandum to Wolf Ladejinski, 19 November 1960, p.7.

²⁵¹ Jonas, Memorandum to Wolf Ladejinski, 19 November 1960, p.6.

The program to produce authoritative authors supportive of the Diem regime also included a provision to employ legitimate correspondents on the Oram and GVN payroll. The goal was to “subsidize” one or two accredited magazine writers who would be placed in Saigon “with the prior agreement that they will file regularly articles for American magazines of first caliber.” According to Jonas, “we have already located one such writer- Preston Schoyer—whose political views are as sympathetic as one can get and who would be very willing to undertake such an arrangement.” Schoyer’s resumé had included working for such publications as the New York Times, Sunday Magazine, the New Yorker, and the Reporter, as well as authoring several books. The terms of the agreement with Schoyer would, according to Jonas, cost \$12,000 for two years “and would result in about six or eight magazine articles a year from Saigon and with a favorable point of view.”²⁵²

The final element in Oram’s program of developing a favorable new public relations infrastructure was the introduction of what Noam Chomsky calls “flak” as a mechanism of controlling critical media content. Increasingly adopted by the firm, flak represented an application of power, influence or coercion targeted toward specific individuals or organizations in response to their negative reporting.²⁵³ Flak also provided a demonstrative indication to other members of the media of the consequences of challenging existing hegemonic constructs. Included in the program description was a warning that “someone will have to lay down the law to the American community, including ICA people, and [some businessmen] who appear to be the main source of griping.” The reference does not identify the individual or agency that would administer punishment; however, the close association of Oram with the Central Intelligence Agency, State Department and prominent members of the domestic foreign policy community imparted a significant measure of influence to any attempt to “lay down the law.”²⁵⁴

Reflecting the importance of maintaining the support of American liberals, Oram and the Vietnam Lobby applied its mechanisms of promotion developed prior to Diem’s 1957 tour. AFV conferences continued to remain a staple of the Vietnam Lobby as they “produced news in the mass media during slack periods and ...favorable materials...to pinpointed audiences involved in relevant decision making or opinion formulating positions.”²⁵⁵ The importance of presenting Diem’s leadership as progressive led Oram and the AFV to organize a conference entitled “Social

²⁵² Jonas, Memorandum to Wolf Ladejinski, 19 November 1960, p.7.

²⁵³ Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, Manufacturing Consent, p.126-28.

²⁵⁴ Jonas, Memorandum to Wolf Ladejinski, 19 November 1960, p.5.

²⁵⁵ Jonas, Memorandum to Wolf Ladejinski, 19 November 1960, p.7.

Welfare and Democracy in Free Vietnam" in October, 1959. Emphasizing the successful reformist policies of Diem's government, the meeting, according to Jonas, stemmed "from our efforts to stress the positive achievements of the Government" in ways designed to retain liberal support.²⁵⁶

Oram and the AFV continued efforts to place favorable articles in selected publications, especially elite publications like Pacific Affairs, the Reporter, Foreign Affairs and the New Republic. As in the past, favorable articles carried in these works provided Diem's promotion a valuable means to legitimate its message to select audiences and, accordingly, reprints were distributed "in very large quantity."²⁵⁷ Also, personal associations between Oram members and individual journalists were recognized within the Vietnam Lobby as an effective mechanism for influencing media content. Gilbert Jonas, for example, encouraged Wolf Ladejinski to maintain his close social contact with Dick Watts of the New York Post. Following his repeated evaluation of Watts' column, Jonas smugly reported that "apparently he [Watts] is running hard to become the Number One Ladejinski fan in the United States."²⁵⁸

However, the growth of negative material in the media necessitated a shift away from proactive promotion to more reactive rebuttals. Articles perceived to be particularly damaging were targeted by Oram, which orchestrated the content and authorship of custom-designed responses. A July, 1957, article in the Socialist Call criticizing the suppression of civil liberties under Diem (made possible by the extension of aid to South Vietnam) had resulted in expressions of outrage among domestic socialist leaders. Joseph Buttinger, himself a socialist, met with those concerned with the article and succeeded in placating them with, according to Oram records, "adequate answers to the charges." The subsequent arrest of a prominent Vietnamese socialist leader was also received negatively by domestic American socialists until a personal intervention by Harold Oram effectively diffused the issue.²⁵⁹ After Life magazine's depiction of some aspects of repression within South Vietnam had alienated Norman Thomas, a founding member of the AFV, Oram once again asked Buttinger to intervene and, according to Jonas, it was only in response to Buttinger's promise of a serious investigation "that we were able to prevent this [Thomas'] concern from being expressed more publicly in a wider arena."²⁶⁰ These damage

²⁵⁶ Jonas, Memorandum to Wolf Ladejinski, 19 November 1960, p.10.

²⁵⁷ Gilbert Jonas, Ladejinski, Letter to Wolf Ladejinski - American Embassy, Saigon, Vietnam, 30 March 1960, p.1., Oram Papers, A90-39, 35/8.

²⁵⁸ Gilbert Jonas, Ladejinski, Letter to Wolf Ladejinski - American Embassy, Saigon, Vietnam, 5 December 1960, p.2., Oram Papers, University of Indiana, Indianapolis Archive: A90-39, 35/8.

²⁵⁹ Gilbert Jonas, American Friends of Vietnam, "Memorandum to Mr. Nguyen Phu Duc First Secretary of the Embassy of Vietnam", 24 April 1958, p.4., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 17.

²⁶⁰ Jonas, "Memorandum to Mr. Nguyen Phu Duc First Secretary of the Embassy of Vietnam", 24 April 1958, p.11.

control tactics were not necessarily directly administered by AFV and Oram, as their close affiliations with influential media members and organizations permitted co-operative responses to serious criticism. A negative article carried by both the Washington Post and the Times-Herald, in 1958, motivated Oram to seek advice from members of the media community, although in this case the best response seemed to be no response. Reporting on this cooperative approach, Oram wrote that, "In our conferences with some of the national magazines, including Life, it was their opinion that while effective answers could have been published widely in national magazines, this would serve a harmful purpose by giving broader currency to the charges."²⁶¹

Complementing Oram's defense of Diem and his government was an effort to coopt the prestigious American Overseas Club (OPC). While Oram had from its inception regularly held the AFV's Executive Committee meetings at the OPC, new relationships between the firm and Club were developed between 1958 and 1959 as a means to influence media content. The Club represented an important institution among correspondents, to help them with their work by providing knowledgeable speakers, libraries, a weekly Bulletin mailed overseas, and a Freedom of Press and Information Committee. Oram's closer association with the Press Club was both informal and institutional in nature. Among the methods used were Harold Oram's personal membership in the Club and his firm's contracted efforts to raise funds to expand the organization into a World Press Club. Thanks to that contract between 1958 and 1959, the firm associated closely with influential members of the Club's board, including Clare Boothe Luce, herself an early advocate of Diem. Oram's networking resulted in some influence over the conduct of the Club and, by extension, its individual memberships. Illustrative of this was a report by Jonas to Ladejinski outlining the firm's role in countering any criticism of the Club toward the GVN's suppression of an American correspondent. "It took quite a bit of doing," Jonas reported, "but we persuaded the Overseas Press Club that no freedom of the press was involved, and the right people all over town, including UP, have been appraised of the situation."²⁶²

The American economic assistance program increasingly attracted the attention of Oram, the American Friends of Vietnam, and the South Vietnamese Government between 1958 and 1960. American financial aid to the GVN had been described as promoting an "economic miracle" in the South, a dual consequence of affiliation with the Free World and of Diem's policies. Intended to rapidly impart a measure of prosperity to the South, assistance was channeled

²⁶¹ Jonas, "Memorandum to Mr. Nguyen Phu Duc First Secretary of the Embassy of Vietnam", 24 April 1958, p.18.

²⁶² Gilbert Jonas, Ladejinski, Letter to Wolf Ladejinski - American Embassy, Saigon, Vietnam, 5 June 1959, p.1., Oram Papers, A90-39, 35/8.

through the Commercial Import Program (C.I.P.). The focus of the program was to ensure a ready supply of American currency in the South, essentially underwriting South Vietnam's deficit in balance of trade payments. United States economic support to the South in 1958 under this program amounted to a subsidy of 85% of the GVN's deficit.²⁶³ The effect of the C.I.P. was to flood urban areas of South Vietnam with consumer goods without creating any real prosperity founded upon economic development and independence. Concern within the GVN, the American government and the Vietnam Lobby that American assistance be maintained to ensure the viability of South Vietnam was accompanied by an awareness of the personal dependence of Diem upon the continuation of aid. Diem's role as the sole conduit for American economic assistance, allied with the illusion of domestic prosperity experienced under his administration, had remained an essential element of both his support in South Vietnam and his promotion within the United States. Accordingly, the GVN, the Vietnam Lobby and Oram increasingly dedicated their resources to preserving and defending the American assistance program in an effort to maintain both the South's precarious economic development and Diem's political, social and public relations position.

A series of articles critical of the American aid program to South Vietnam by Albert Colegrove in late July, 1959, forced Oram and the Vietnam Lobby to adopt a defensive campaign to minimize the damage to the aid program and Diem's reputation. The series of six articles carried by the Scripps-Howard newspaper chain alleged mass waste, incompetence, and corruption within the assistance program to the South. Reported in the wake of the 1958 best seller The Ugly American, which criticized American foreign aid programs, the series was perceived by the Vietnam Lobby and the American government to represent a serious potential threat to the continuation of the assistance program and to the reputation of South Vietnam's leadership. Earlier promotion of Diem as a responsible and efficient administrator of aid and architect of South Vietnam's economic miracle had associated his public image with the program to such a degree that criticism of the American assistance program inevitably tainted his administration.

Oram's initial response to the series was to evaluate its impact as largely limited to Colegrove's 2.5 million potential readers and unlikely to influence passage of an impending aid bill. The principal focus of the public relations program was thus to limit coverage of the allegations. According to Oram, "one of our main objectives has been to keep the controversy

²⁶³ Marvin E. Gettleman, Vietnam and American, p.146.

limited to the Scripps-Howard chain."²⁶⁴ Personal associations between AFV members and individual journalist were then applied in order to shape coverage. Ladejinski, in a letter to Jonas reporting on a meeting with a Washington Post editor regarding the Colegrove series, indicated that the favorable content which followed was the consequence of his intervention. According to Ladejinski, Oram should "thank your 'agent' here" as the editor "tells me he is thoroughly satisfied that ICA program in Vietnam is good and that the Scripps-Howard charges were unfounded"²⁶⁵ Oram and the AFV also sought to sponsor other traditional promotional methods to counter the Scripps-Howard charges, including a South Vietnamese Vice-Presidential tour of the United States and the scheduling of another national conference. Jonas supported these events as a means to counteract Colegrove's negative coverage and "demonstrate the positive achievements made by Vietnam with U.S. aid."²⁶⁶

A calculated program of flak directed at Scripps-Howard and individuals involved in the allegations was also implemented. Jonas and Ladejinski structured a three - part campaign to identify and punish those associated with the Colegrove charges. The first target was Scripps-Howard, as Jonas sought information to discredit the business practices of the organization. Jonas wrote Ladejinski:

While I was in Saigon I heard a great deal from many people about the UPI contract for Radio Vietnam. I understand tremendous pressure was exerted on the Vietnamese government to take this contract. I would like to get as much documentary and detailed information about this as possible in order to demonstrate that UPI was using its influence to force a service on the Vietnamese which they did not want and did not need, (since Vietnam Press already subscribes to UPI). Because UPI is now owned by Scripps-Howard, I can make a rather effective case that this series amounts to the pot calling the kettle black.²⁶⁷

Jonas also sought to identify "informers" who leaked information to Colegrove. In one instance, he sought information that might discredit one of those troublesome informants:

Can you document for me as much as possible materials on his character and various shady enterprises? For example, I was told he ran a brothel in Saigon before the government forced him out of it and also that he was kicked out of the Philippines. There

²⁶⁴ Gilbert Jonas, Ladejinski, Letter to Wolf Ladejinski - American Embassy, Saigon, Vietnam, 11 August 1959, p.1., Oram Papers, A90-39, 35/8.

²⁶⁵ Gilbert Jonas, Ladejinski, Letter to Wolf Ladejinski - American Embassy, Saigon, Vietnam, 9 January 1960, p.1., Oram Papers, A90-39, 35/8.

²⁶⁶ Gilbert Jonas, Ladejinski, Letter to Wolf Ladejinski - American Embassy, Saigon, Vietnam, 11 August 1959, p.1., Oram Papers, A90-39, 35/8.

²⁶⁷ Jonas, Letter to Wolf Ladejinski - American Embassy, Saigon, Vietnam, 11 August 1959, p.2.

was even a story circulating that he was involved in narcotics. Any information of this sort or of general bad business practice would be of great assistance to us here.²⁶⁸

Congressional subcommittee investigations provoked by the Colegrove charges officially exonerated the American aid program of wrong doing. Chaired by long time Diem supporters, Clement Zablocki in the House and Mike Mansfield in the Senate, the subcommittees provided an influential platform for challenging the veracity of the charges and credibility of Scripps-Howard and Colegrove. Zablocki attacked the series as “irresponsible journalism”, while others in the State Department emphasized the detrimental consequences of redirecting resources in South Vietnam to defend themselves from such attacks.²⁶⁹

The AFV also belatedly became involved in the public condemnation of the sponsors of the articles. Three months after the Colegrove charges, O’Daniel attacked the series in a New York Times letter to the editor as “disgraceful examples of...yellow journalism”, which provided “grist for the Communist propaganda machine.” O’Daniel declared himself “outraged” that Scripps-Howard would carry such “unfounded charges based upon rumor and hearsay” at a time when the “Communists have launched an all-out offensive of terror in Free Vietnam.” Labeling the aid program to South Vietnam “an enormous success”, the AFV’s chairman hoped that, as a consequence of the articles the United States’ “valiant Vietnamese allies will not suffer demoralization.”²⁷⁰ Representing the charges in these terms permitted the AFV to depict Colegrove and Scripps-Howard as both unprofessional and unpatriotic, willing to undermine a successful and essential American ally.

Despite these effective efforts to defend Diem and the aid program, Oram and the AFV recognized that their dependence upon reactive campaigning had resulted in a situation in which they were “running around frantically from place to place plugging up dikes rather than propelling a sustained drive.”²⁷¹ Seeking to complement its reactive defense of Diem and his government against a domestic media increasingly willing to evaluate and criticize South Vietnam’s policies, Oram and the Vietnam Lobby therefore attempted to construct more proactive promotional campaigns intended to accommodate Diem with American liberals. The focus of these initiatives was to reaffirm South Vietnam’s anti-Communist role while injecting images of reformism and liberalization under Diem’s direction. Earlier emphasis on South Vietnam’s push for

²⁶⁸ Jonas, Letter to Wolf Ladejnski - American Embassy, Saigon, Vietnam, 11 August 1959, p.2.

²⁶⁹ David L. Anderson, Trapped By Success, p.180.

²⁷⁰ Lt. General John W, O’ Daniel (Ret), “Aid to Vietnam: Program Viewed As Success, Attacks Against It Protested,” The New York Times, 7 September 1959, p.14.

²⁷¹ Gilbert Jonas, Ladejnski, Letter to Wolf Ladejnski - American Embassy, Saigon, Vietnam, 11 August 1959, p.1., Oram Papers, A90-39, 35/8.

industrialization and infrastructure development was recognized within Oram as an effective defense of primitive political practices in the South. According to Jonas, “many liberals will undoubtedly realize that greater political democracy can only follow from increased economic development, particularly in the industrial area.”²⁷² Liberal concern about both civil liberties and economic development permitted Oram to frame the issue of repressive and authoritarian government as a developmental problem, thereby maintaining the support of influential liberals in Congress, the media and the foreign policy community. The results of the American elections in November, 1958, prompted Oram to write to the South Vietnamese embassy “urging new emphasis on land reform and agricultural achievements, as opposed to a single-minded anti-Communist approach”²⁷³, and in October, 1959, Oram organized a conference dedicated to social and economic issues in South Vietnam. Ladejinski wrote that the purpose of the conference was to emphasize “the social and economic achievements of the Government in terms of justice for the population in order to reach the liberals and intellectuals in the U.S.A.”²⁷⁴

Central to the promotion in the Vietnam Lobby’s representation of Diem as a social and economic reformer was the South’s agrarian reform program. Depicted in terms reflecting American political values, agrarian reform included issues of effective administration, economic enfranchisement and mass support for the GVN, all relevant to Diem’s viability in his struggle against Communism. The principal advocate and spokesman of the new South Vietnamese agrarian program was Wolf Ladejinski, a popularly recognized expert on the subject. His participation at the AFV’s conference generated authoritative promotional material used by Oram and the AFV in press releases and mailings and by Wesley Fishel in his new edited book, Problems of Freedom: South Vietnam since Independence. Meanwhile, Oram and the AFV churned out related press releases and interviews and even a children’s book by General O’Daniel entitled, The Nation That Refused to Starve.²⁷⁵

Contrary to Diem’s repeated requests of Oram to promote industrialization in the South, Ladejinski and Oram now represented Diem as a realist dedicated primarily to land reform issues. Ladejinski’s address reported that, “It is important to note in this connection, that, unlike other leaders of primarily agrarian and under-developed countries, the President has not been swayed by the glittering promises of industrialization as the sole panacea of Free Vietnam’s problems. In

²⁷² Gilbert Jonas, American Friends of Vietnam, “Memorandum to Mr. Nguyen Phu Duc First Secretary of the Embassy of Vietnam”, 24 April 1958, p.20., Oram Papers, A92-19, Box 1, Folder 17.

²⁷³ Ladejinski, “Oram Memorandum,” 7 July 1960, p.1., Oram Papers, A90-39, 35/8.

²⁷⁴ Ladejinski, “Oram Memorandum,” 7 July 1960, p.1.

²⁷⁵ General John W. O’Daniel, The Nation That Refused to Starve (New York:Coward - McCann, 1960)

placing his emphasis on agriculture, the country's real source of wealth, he has indeed advocated a policy of 'first things first.'²⁷⁶ Depicting Diem as dedicated to implementing reform at the base of South Vietnam's social and economic pyramid differentiated Diem from other Asian leaders while indicating his effective use of American assistance.

Moreover, Diem's role as the principal architect of the land reform program was shown to be a consequence of his commitment to the principle of private property in opposition to Communist collectivism. According to Ladejinski, "President Diem has repeatedly laid down the proposition that small-scale property-ownership in general, and small-scale land-ownership in particular, constitute the very basis of an orderly, stable, democratic society."²⁷⁷ The success of the campaign was shown to be dependent upon earlier successes by the Diem government in overcoming internal difficulties and gradually establishing the necessary legislative foundation. Ladejinski, Oram and the AFV frequently promoted Diem's passage of ordinances, which reduced rents, secured tenure and brought abandoned land into production as representative of the positive and popular focus of the South's land reform policy under Diem's direction.

An essential element of the public relations campaign involved the reputed support of Vietnamese landlords for the land reform policy. According to Ladejinski, "one is struck by the mildness, not to say total lack, of opposition."²⁷⁸ Representing opposition to the program as restricted to North Vietnam and Communist agents avoided the image of forced redistribution of lands, a charge reminiscent of communist actions, and one which could prove problematic with American audiences. The reported lack of opposition to the policy also permitted Oram and the AFV to indicate that agrarian reform was a mechanism for enhancing the domestic popularity of Diem and the GVN. Ladejinski, in promoting this image, wrote, that the South Vietnamese "know equally well that important changes have been affected by their Government, and therein lies, among other things, an important source of political capital." Any deficiencies within the agrarian reform campaign were reported to be "inevitable and not surprising" given the fact that Diem was leading a "new nation struggling for survival."²⁷⁹

²⁷⁶ Wolf Ladejinski, Ladejinski, "Agrarian Reform In Free Vietnam: An Address by Wolf Ladejinski, Land Reform Expert, Technical Consultant at the Presidency, Republic of Vietnam at the American Friends of Vietnam Conference on Social Development and Welfare in Vietnam," Press Release, 24 October 1959, p.16., Oram Papers, A90-39, 35/8.

²⁷⁷ Ladejinski, "Agrarian Reform In Free Vietnam", p.16.

²⁷⁸ Ladejinski, "Agrarian Reform In Free Vietnam", p.16.

²⁷⁹ Ladejinski, "Agrarian Reform In Free Vietnam", p.17.

Promotion of the land reform program also focused heavily upon the Cai San Resettlement Project, represented as an unequivocal success which had resulted in the creation of a “thriving metropolis.”²⁸⁰ A model for the economic development and integration of farmers as “full fledged members of the body-politic of the country” in opposition to Communism, Cai San was shown to be a direct consequence of Diem’s leadership. Developed “entirely upon the initiative of the President”, the Cai San and the High Plateau projects were presented as indicative of Diem’s role as a progressive social and economic reformer. Here was a potent regional model cast in opposition to the North’s land redistribution campaign.²⁸¹ Ladejinski concluded that, “for the rest of free Southeast Asia, the [Diem’s] reforms and the methods of their implementation carry the conviction that lasting social improvements cannot be found at the end of a Communist gun barrel. In the company of some other non-Communist Asian nations, Free Vietnam is demonstrating anew that where there is the will to redress the injustices of an agrarian system, a way can be found, and without paying the price of the tragic upheaval of Communist agrarianism.”²⁸²

South Vietnam’s national elections in August, 1959, also attracted the attention of Diem’s promotional machine. The GVN’s repressive and undemocratic conduct during the election, noted by both the American government and media, necessitated a defensive reaction from Diem’s advocates. Reminiscent of the 1956 election, Diem’s brother Nhu and Can Lao, the secret organization in support of Diem’s government, carried out an effective program of intimidation and harassment of opposition parties and candidates. The majority of the seats lost by the government in the National Assembly were in fact lost to “independent candidates” favorable to the government, and Dr. Phan Quang Dan, a genuine dissident who received six times the support of the government’s candidate was subsequently convicted on fabricated electoral fraud charges. Following the election Ambassador Durbrow was forced to report to the State Department that there appeared to be “no progress towards liberalization [of the] regime.” Durbrow also cabled that “elections [in] South Vietnam, with possible exception Saigon area, [were] not electoral contests in our sense as much as [an] opportunity [for the] GVN [to] propagandize achievements of regime among people and engage [in a] large anti-VC propaganda exercise.” Of particular concern to Durbrow and the State Department was the threat that the “increasingly obvious GVN manipulation of elections” would be “picked up by foreign

²⁸⁰ Ladejinski, “Agrarian Reform In Free Vietnam”, p.8.

²⁸¹ “Farm Aide Hails Vietnamese Gains: Ladejinski Reports Marked Progress in the Southern Area’s Reform Program”, *The New York Times*, 25 October 1959, p.4.

²⁸² Wolf Ladejinski, “Agrarian Reform In Free Vietnam: An Address by Wolf Ladejinski, Land Reform Expert, Technical Consultant at the Presidency, Republic of Vietnam,” Press Release, 24 October 1959, p.18.

correspondents to the detriment GVN prestige and [thereby] feed Hanoi propaganda."²⁸³

American media coverage of South Vietnam's national election also reflected this discrepancy between the previously idealized promotion of the GVN and the reality of Diem's authoritarian government.

As in the past, Oram committed itself to marginalizing and trivializing Diem's opposition. Jonas reported to Harold Oram that Oram and the AFV, "should make a point of noting that whatever opposition exists is almost exclusively among a small group of urban intellectuals and not representative of the majority in the rural areas and that they are by and large unhappy job seekers or of mediocre caliber." Representing opposition members in these terms deflected examination of the effect of Diem's authoritarian style of government on the political process, including repression of all significant political opponents. Meanwhile, the insignificant opposition could be useful. Jonas advised that he "would not recommend that Vietnamese dissidents be muffled because their criticism is proof of an open society and belies the charge of censorship of the opposition, whatever it may be."²⁸⁴

Direct defense of Diem's handling of the national election was principally conducted by AFV member Wesley Fishel, the senior American advisor to the GVN for governmental development. Recognized within the media as a valuable resource on South Vietnamese affairs, Fishel's validation of the election focused heavily upon both the needs of Vietnam and on Diem's personality. His article "Vietnam's Democratic One-Man Rule" in the New Leader maintained the earlier themes promoted by Oram during Diem's 1957 tour of the United States. South Vietnam was represented as a country lacking in democratic traditions, values and effective institutions, and the difficulties in developing Western style democracy within this context were shown by Fishel to be compounded by the very real threat of North Vietnam. Within this environment, security was seen to be an essential prerequisite permitting gradual and progressive democratic development. Diem's personal commitment to democracy and liberalism, allied with his supposed altruistic nature, would preclude excessively repressive measures by the GVN:

Ngo Dinh Diem has all the authority and all the power one needs to operate a dictatorship, but he isn't operating one! Here is a leader who speaks the language of democracy, who holds the power of a dictatorship, who governs a Republic in accordance with the terms of a Constitution. The Constitution was written at his request by the people of the Republic.

²⁸³ "Telegram From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Durbrow) to the Department of State," 28 August 1959, Foreign Relations of the United States: 1958- 1960 Vol.1. Vietnam, p.228.

²⁸⁴ Gilbert Jonas, Ladejinski, Letter to Wolf Ladejinski - American Embassy, Saigon, Vietnam, 11 August 1959, p.5., Oram Papers, A90-39, 35/8.

Ngo Dinh Diem did not have to do this. His authority and power at this moment were so absolute.²⁸⁵

Between late 1957 and the end of the Eisenhower administration, involvement of the American government in the promotion of Diem and the GVN began to escalate following an extended period of distraction and inaction. The success of the Vietnam Lobby and the South Vietnamese government in representing Diem's policies as progressive, viable and reflective of American national interests had until late 1957 permitted a governmental policy of benign neglect. But now the State Department, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the National Security Council were all concerned about the GVN's American and international standing, concern derived from a complex mixture of Diem's declining popular image, renewed communist activity, and Oram's defensive promotional campaigns. Consistently, in official evaluations, Diem continued to be perceived as synonymous with the GVN, due to the absence of any alternative leadership candidates. Accordingly, official American efforts to reinforce the GVN and define its role as a liberal regional partner were linked to Diem and his government.

The State Department by late 1957, recognized that the repressive policies of the GVN were destructive to the regime's international representation within the media. Ambassador Durbrow's concern that Diem extend "basic human rights and give gradually greater reality to representative government" represented more than a moral or ethical issue. Durbrow suggested that GVN reforms "importantly position the international prestige of the Government, its propaganda position vis-a-vis the Communist regime in North Viet-Nam, and its degree of support by the Vietnamese intellectuals."²⁸⁶ As had Oram, American officials emphasized that the disappointing political and civil liberties policies of Diem and the GVN had to be placed within the context of a threatening communist insurgency, but the administration realized that it faced an increasingly difficult task in "gaining support in Congress and among the American people."²⁸⁷

²⁸⁵ Wesley Fishel, "Vietnam's Democratic One - Man Rule," The New Leader, 2 November 1959, p.13.

²⁸⁶ Dispatch From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Durbrow) to the Department of State, 7 December 1959, Foreign Relations of the United States: 1958- 1960 Vol.1. Vietnam, p.269.

²⁸⁷ "Joint Chiefs of Staff Memorandum for National Security Council Staff," 14 July 1959, U.S. Department of Defense, United States- Vietnam relations, 1945-1967: Study Prepared by the Department of Defense. book 2. (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971), p.1211.

Both South Vietnam's ability to act as an "economic showcase" and Diem's potential role as a regional anti-neutralist champion were earlier public relations constructs of the Vietnam Lobby which were subsequently integrated into American official policy. The State Department in December, 1954, had perceived the potential impact of South Vietnam as a regional "showcase" founded upon qualities of nationalism, but it was only in 1957, after Oram's campaign, that the government turned to the regional model idea - based upon Diem's economic success. A paper prepared for the Joint Chiefs of Staff's Operations Coordination Board, in June, 1958, committed the organization to "publicize, without giving [the] impression Viet-Nam is dependent upon the United States, the benefits and progress derived from U.S. aid programs, regional defense pacts and free world trade."²⁸⁸ This was part of a general policy of the Joint Chiefs, articulated in July, 1959, that foreign governments and peoples "must be made to realize that the United States is seeking to develop indigenous economies to the point of their being self-sustaining with a minimum of outside aid, and that prospects for a healthy and viable economy depends upon association with Free World nations rather than those of the Sino-Soviet Bloc. Covers of action must be made so designed as to create favorable public impressions immediately and to maintain public support to fruition."²⁸⁹

Diem's opposition to neutralism in Southeast Asia had been introduced into his public relations platform by Oram in early 1957 and was heavily promoted during his May, 1957, tour of the United States. Positioning Diem and his government as regional champions of affiliation with the Free World permitted Oram, the AFV, and the South Vietnamese to accommodate Washington's evolving perceptions regarding American interests in Southeast Asia. Soviet and Chinese initiatives to promote neutralism as an alternative to participation in the bipolar Cold War had between 1955 and 1957 generated significant concern within the State Department. Khrushchev used his late 1955 tour of India, Burma and Afghanistan as an opportunity to promote "genuine independent nationalist" regimes with neutralist policies in opposition to American demands for commitment to the Free World.²⁹⁰ Soviet economic and military assistance to countries like Egypt, Syria and Indonesia continued, and echoing the Soviet initiative, China's Chou-En-Lai also supported the nonaligned movement, most notably at the Bandung Conference. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles viewed neutralism in terms of the Munich analogy and, in

²⁸⁸ "Paper Prepared by the Operations Coordination Board," 4 June 1958, Foreign Relations of the United States: 1958- 1960 Vol.1. Vietnam, p.52.

²⁸⁹ "Joint Chiefs of Staff Memorandum for National Security Council Staff," 14 July 1959, U.S. Department of Defense, United States- Vietnam relations, 1945-1967: Study Prepared by the Department of Defense. book 2. (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971),p.1227.

²⁹⁰ R.B. Smith, An Interpretation History of the Vietnam War, vol.1. Revolution vs. Containment, 1955-1961 (Hong Kong: MacMillan, 1983), p.103.

June, 1956, declared that neutralism was an “increasingly obsolete conception” which was “immoral and short-sighted.”²⁹¹ While the State Department developed some flexibility regarding neutralist sentiment in the late 1950’s, policy remained heavily focused upon sponsoring association with the Free World.

Oram’s promotion and Diem’s self-promotion of Vietnam as a regional American ally in opposition to neutralism preceded State Department interest in such an idea. Ambassador Durbrow’s cable to the Department of State in May, 1957, reflected Diem’s self-promotion by reporting that “Diem has [the] impression [that] neutralism has lost much of its appeal since [the] Bandung Conference. He said he now believed [that] friendly Indian attitude toward GVN [was] due primarily to fact that through its alliance with western bloc and American, Australian, and British aid and support, country [Vietnam] is succeeding. This, Diem believes, had influenced most other Commonwealth countries to look askance at Indian neutralism.”²⁹²

GVN resistance to neutralism at regional conferences and other venues was increasingly welcomed by the State Department. Having cast himself as an active rival to neutralism internationally, Diem had by December, 1957, received advice from the Department to “assume a more important role as a Free World leader in Asia.” The Department further indicated that “generally, we should encourage Viet-Nam to pursue its policy of strengthening its position through active participation in international meetings and organizations, such as the Colombo Plan, through the maintenance and development of cordial relations with the countries in the Free World, and through broad exchanges with these countries.”²⁹³ John Foster Dulles requested Eisenhower to send an open letter to Diem on the first anniversary of his American visit as a means to encourage his opposition to regional neutralism. Of particular concern to Dulles were the neutralist foreign policies of Laos and Indonesia and China’s assistance to Cambodia’s Prince Norodom Sihanouk. Eisenhower’s subsequent letter promoted Diem as “the foremost advocate of our interests in the area”, noting Diem’s frequent tours to the Philippines, India, South Korea, Thailand and Australia.²⁹⁴ The Vietnam Lobby’s hopeful vision of Diem’s regional role had become a significant reality.

²⁹¹ Michael A. Guhin, John Foster Dulles, p.255.

²⁹² “Telegram from the Ambassador in Vietnam (Durbrow) to the Department of State,” 26 July 1957, Foreign Relations of the United States: 1958- 1960 Vol.1. Vietnam,p.830.

²⁹³ “Dispatch From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Durbrow) to the Department of State,” 5 December 1957, Foreign Relations of the United States: 1958- 1960 Vol.1. Vietnam, p.874.

²⁹⁴ Dulles memorandum to Eisenhower, 22 May 1958, FRUS - 1958, p.39.

By 1959, increasingly obstructive activities on the part of the South Vietnamese embassy in Washington undermined the ability of the Vietnam Lobby and Oram to conduct comprehensive campaigns either promoting Diem and the GVN or defending it from an increasingly critical media. The support of the South Vietnamese embassy in Washington was essential to Oram as the terms of its 1956 contract with the GVN placed the firm under the direction of the embassy's staff. Accordingly, as awareness grew within the organization of the embassy's program to discredit Oram and hobble its activities, so too did the firm's bewilderment and frustration.

Oram's increasing assumption of the embassy's duties without securing additional funding or resources was by November, 1958, an issue of mounting concern. The embassy was evaluated by Jonas as "distressingly understaffed" and lacking in trained information people capable of conducting routine public relations functions. Oram reports indicated that as a result, "the burden for Embassy functions in the informational and other areas necessarily falls on Harold Oram, Inc. We are also by default responsible for many activities that might otherwise be carried on by a consul general and a U.N. mission in New York." The consequences of this strain on resources was recognized within the firm as decreasing "the amount of effective public relations, especially in terms of advocacy, that we can undertake"²⁹⁵

Oram and AFV activities in support of Diem's leadership were also systematically hindered by the South Vietnamese Ambassador to Washington, Tran Van Chuong. The estranged parents of Madame Ngo Dinh Nhu, Ambassador Chuong and his wife (the South Vietnamese observer to the United Nations) actively sought to undermine the Diem government due to past grievances involving the loss of rice properties to land reform programs and thwarted personal ambitions for a greater role in government.²⁹⁶ By late 1960, Ambassador Chuong's opposition to promotional activities in support of Diem had allowed him to undermine fundamentally Diem's standing among important American audiences, and Chuong's obstruction of Oram and AFV programs also fostered disillusionment and divisions within Diem's long-standing community of American supporters. The Chuongs' efforts to weaken Diem's government would continue into the Kennedy administration, including sponsorship of South Vietnamese dissidents critical to Diem within the United States and condemnation of the Diem government's

²⁹⁵ Gilbert Jonas, Ladejinski, Letter to Wolf Ladejinski - American Embassy, Saigon, Vietnam, 19 November 1958, p.1., Oram Papers, A90-39, 35/8.

²⁹⁶ Ellen J. Hammer, A Death in November: An American in Vietnam, p.194.

handling of the Vietnamese Buddhists. Following their eventual dismissal by the South Vietnamese government in 1963 and Diem's subsequent death in November, the couple approached American officials seeking posts in any succeeding government as a reward for their consistent efforts to undermine Diem's regime.²⁹⁷

Oram's awareness of the embassy's subversive agenda was gradual, perceived at first as a consequence of limited resources and unfamiliarity with promotional activities. Jonas wrote of this confusion in July, 1960, stating that "one cannot help but wonder whether the Ambassador really wants us to continue to build support for Vietnam here; or whether his judgment is simply bad; or whether he feels our approach is too aggressive." The Ambassador and the embassy's liaison for the Oram contract frequently either refused to provide direction or gave Oram verbal instructions that avoided any documentation of their role in directing public relations policy. As awareness of the Ambassador's divergent agenda developed within the firm, so to did its concern that "we were being set up for the fall guy by getting our instructions, both positive and negative, in verbal form."²⁹⁸ While Oram struggled to make meaning of the embassy's actions, Ladejinski in Saigon reported that Chuong had actively been trying to discredit the firm with Diem. In a cable to Oram, Ladejinski wrote that in a meeting between Chuong and Diem, "Chuong really did a job on you.... I am told he misses no opportunity to stick a pin in."²⁹⁹

Ambassador Chuong also imposed restrictions on the availability of information on South Vietnam to Oram and the Vietnam Lobby. Oram's ability to work effectively was dependent upon the embassy in Washington providing material on South Vietnam's development, as there were no other effective avenues of communication and information available. Reduction in the amount of embassy material had progressively deteriorated from 1958 until, by 1960, the scarcity had severely handicapped domestic promotional activities. Jonas was forced to request information on South Vietnam from Ladejinski in May, 1960, reporting that "our only source right now is the press."³⁰⁰ By the end of the Eisenhower administration the situation had deteriorated to the point that Jonas protested that he had been "working from a crystal ball and an ouiji board to ascertain what has been going on in Viet Nam for the past year."³⁰¹

²⁹⁷ Hammer, *A Death in November: An American in Vietnam*, p.194.

²⁹⁸ Ladejinski, "Oram Memorandum," 7 July 1960, p.3., Oram Papers, A90-39, 35/8.

²⁹⁹ Wolf Ladejinski, Ladejinski, "Correspondence to Harold Oram," 16 June 1960, p.1., Oram Papers, A90-39, 35/8.

³⁰⁰ Gilbert Jonas, Ladejinski, "Correspondence to Wolf Ladejinski," 6 May 1960, p.1., Oram Papers, A90-39, 35/8.

³⁰¹ Gilbert Jonas, Ladejinski, "Correspondence to Wolf Ladejinski," 11 January 1961, p.2., Oram Papers, A90-39, 35/8.

The South Vietnamese embassy also actively undermined specific Oram and Vietnam Lobby promotional campaigns regarding the Scripps-Howard rebuttal, agrarian reform in the South, South Vietnamese political development, and the rising threat of the Communist insurgency in the South. All of these issues were structured by Oram to accommodate both GVN requirements and American perceptions of their own national interests and values. In the wake of Colegrove's charges of waste and corruption in the American aid program, the embassy's refusal to allow Oram and the AFV to immediately counter the Scripps-Howard charges was particularly vexing to Oram and the Vietnam Lobby. Oram's proposal that O'Daniel promptly and publicly condemn the charges was vigorously opposed by Chuong, who reportedly did not want to "antagonize" the publication or provoke "additional irritation."³⁰² The ambassador also prohibited Oram's dissemination of Senator Mansfield's statements vindicating the American aid program of wrong doing.

Embassy obstruction of the Vietnam Lobby's promotional initiatives extended to the issue of agrarian reform under Diem's leadership. Land reform represented an important mechanism for securing the support of both the liberal majority in Congress and essential segments of the American foreign policy community, and Ladejinski's activities sponsored by both Oram and the AFV had succeeded by October, 1959, in securing positive media coverage consistent with their campaign. Chuong's opposition to the promotion manifested itself early in the campaign during April, 1959. A series of articles in the New York Times favorable to Diem's land reform initiative were immediately countered by Chuong, who informed Washington that it should avoid "unrelieved optimism." Oram records indicate that Chuong "tore the land reform program apart as a fraud" following reports that only ten percent of the program had currently been carried out. Fearing "that when the truth is out, it will explode in Vietnam's face and cause great harm," Chuong ordered, in April, 1960, that Oram and the AFV cease defending any agrarian reforms or agricultural developments.³⁰³ Accusing Oram of damaging the international prestige of the South by portraying it as backward and economically primitive, Chuong proposed an emphasis on industrialization, despite the lack of any significant industrial development in the South. Oram's promotional efforts on the economic front thus ground to a halt.

The AFV's agrarian reform campaign was also used by the South Vietnamese Ambassador as a means to discredit Oram with Diem and the GVN. For example, copies of O'Daniel's children's book, The Nation That Refused To Starve, were provided by Oram to the

³⁰² Gilbert Jonas, Ladejinski, "Correspondence to Wolf Ladejinski," 11 April 1960, p.2., Oram Papers, A90-39, 35/8.

³⁰³ Ladejinski, Oram Memorandum, 7 July 1960, p.2., Oram Papers, A90-39, 35/8.

embassy for comment and approval prior to publication. Harold Oram's receipt of a "verbal green light" for the work from Chuong latter gave way to a protest from the Ambassador that he had earlier rejected the book as unsuitable. Criticism of the book was principally focused upon the title and depictions of the dislocation and dire conditions of the South between 1954 and 1955, depictions described as "untrue and insulting."³⁰⁴ Despite the successful American reception of The Nation That Refused To Stave, O'Daniel's work provided Chuong an effective instrument for discrediting Oram. Indeed, this was only one of a series of derogatory reports to Diem concerning the failure of Oram to effectively counter critical coverage or sponsor effective public relations campaigns.

The development of a Vietnamese domestic opposition party and renewed Communist activity were also rejected by the South Vietnamese embassy as suitable subjects for public relations promotion. Jonas sought to represent the party as indicative of the tolerance and democratization of Diem's government, but, according to Jonas, Chuong's liaison to Oram was "behaving rather cutely about everything, particularly the announcement of the new political party, which he tells us to discount." The escalating Communist insurgency which was currently receiving significant attention within the American media was also perceived by Oram and the AFV as representing an important issue which would resonate well with American audiences. Yet, despite daily coverage of the declining security situation in the South, Chuong refused to authorize Oram to "utilize it for our own interests." Jonas reported that , "when virtually every outlet in the media reported the new security crisis in Vietnam, we asked for permission to use at least the published materials to build up support for Vietnam in the face of growing anti-foreign aid criticism in the Congress and elsewhere. It was our natural and only defense."³⁰⁵ The only time the embassy permitted Oram and the AFV to utilize the security situation was during a very limited campaign to solicit funds for the AFV through the New York Times. Oram and AFV appeals to the embassy in March, 1960, for permission to conduct a comprehensive campaign premised upon the Communist insurgency received no response.

Belated defense of Oram's activities was conducted by Wesley Fishel, a principal advisor to Diem in April, 1960. Harold Oram, Gilbert Jonas and the staff of Oram were said by Fishel to "be among the most dedicated, honest, and capable experts in their field," taking only those contracts with which they "are philosophical in sympathy." Fishel reported to Diem that Ambassador Chuong's "ambitions for higher office" had been responsible for undermining the firms promotional initiatives, specifically in the agricultural and security fields, and that the

³⁰⁴ Ladejinski, Oram Memorandum, 7 July 1960, p.2.

³⁰⁵ Ladejinski, Oram Memorandum, 7 July 1960, p.2.

consequences of Chuong's actions were shown to have resulted in severe repercussions among Diem's traditional American base of support. Fishel informed Diem that his Ambassador had "virtually succeeded in destroying the organization of your friends in America," for Chuong's disruption had, in Fishel's judgment, extended beyond the Vietnam Lobby into the American foreign policy community generally. Chuong had "succeeded in alienating the friendship and support for your government of some important Americans," and essentially, Fishel concluded, "we in this country do not consider him among the 'friends of Vietnam' living in the United States."³⁰⁶

The concerted efforts of Chuong and his staff to both hinder the selling of Diem and discredit Oram and the AFV did help undermine the position of the Diem government with American domestic audiences. Conducted during a period of a growing Communist insurrection and negative American media coverage, the obstruction handicapped Diem's position at a time of severe tension in his relationship with members of the American foreign policy community. Chuong's refusal to allow Oram and the AFV to use themes calculated to most effectively defend Diem, including the "natural" issue of the Communist insurgency, exacerbated the inability of the GVN to define itself positively to American audiences. Ultimately, relations between the embassy and Oram deteriorated to the "point where they appear[ed] insoluble" By mid - 1960, Jonas lamented that, "as things now stand, it would seem we are being eased out while our [Vietnamese] colleagues attempt to build up a case for this step."³⁰⁷

The diminishing ability of Oram and the AFV to effectively promote Diem and the GVN with domestic audiences was recognized within the Eisenhower administration as early as October, 1958. Ladejinski consistently provided the State Department with information on promotional issues and the status of relations between Oram and the GVN. Access to this information provided the Department insight into both Diem's public relations campaigns and the informational environment in which Diem and the GVN conducted policy. AFV concerns expressed to Diem in October, 1958, regarding the declining quality of media coverage and the probable threat to his popular image with American audiences was subsequently reported by Ladejinski to the State Department. According to Ladejinski, "Diem had received reports from Buttinger and Fishel indicating he [was] gaining reputations for being too arbitrary, dictatorial and "undemocratic" - that he [was] losing popularity in Viet-Nam as well as in [the] U.S. Various

³⁰⁶ "Letter from Professor Wesley R. Fishel of Michigan State University to the President of the Republic of Vietnam (Diem)," 30 April 1960, Foreign Relations of the United States: 1958- 1960 Vol.1. Vietnam, p.426-431.

³⁰⁷ Gilbert Jonas, Ladejinski, "Correspondence to Wolf Ladejinski," 21 June 1960, p.1., Oram Papers, A90-39, 35/8.

articles in American press magazines along these lines [during the] last six months [had] already perturbed Diem."³⁰⁸ The Department was later well apprised by Ladejinski of Oram's difficulties with the South Vietnamese embassy in Washington, an appraisal that included Fishel's letter to Diem in April, 1960. Access to such information helped convince the State Department to reject its hands off policy regarding Diem's public relations and participate directly in enhancing his image with domestic audiences. The timing of the Department's full entry into the public relations field in December, 1960, coincided with Oram's effective marginalization by the GVN.

As conditions in South Vietnam rapidly deteriorated, Ambassador Durbrow strongly urged political and economic reforms primarily to improve the public relations position of Diem and his government with American audiences. Diem himself was reported by the Ambassador to be "deeply rankled particularly by critical American press stories about [his] autocratic regime and entourage."³⁰⁹ Durbrow was instructed by the State Department to discuss with Diem "certain liberalizing projects which would have a favorable effect on world opinion."³¹⁰ Several of the suggested reforms included publicizing budget hearings, relaxation of the South's press codes and extending the credit available to peasants. Announcement of these programs all at once would, according to the State Department, achieve the "best impact." The reform initiative was presented to Diem as a necessary step in securing his government internationally and one which would not fundamentally undermine the success or stability of the GVN. The Department's position, as stated in a cable to Durbrow, outlined the proscribed approach to Diem:

We, of course recognize that security considerations impose certain limitations on liberalization, but we believe that the political situation requires certain calculated risks in order that the public and world opinion will become convinced of the sincerity of the steps you are taking to evoke broad participation in your efforts to improve security and develop the economy and institutions of Viet-Nam: It is our belief that the liberalization schemes should be clear-cut, effective, and of a broad nature so that the impact of their announcement will have the desired beneficial effect on the public here and abroad and will enhance the public support for your regime.³¹¹

Durbrow then supplemented the American reform initiative with instructions on how to improve the GVN's media relations activities:

³⁰⁸ Telegram From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Durbrow) to the Department of State," 3 October 1958, Foreign Relations of the United States: 1958- 1960 Vol.1. Vietnam, p.420-439.

³⁰⁹ "Telegram from the Ambassador in Vietnam (Durbrow) to the Department of State," 15 December 1960, Foreign Relations of the United States: 1958- 1960 Vol.1. Vietnam, p.733.

³¹⁰ "Saigon 1216 to the Department of State," 24 December 1960, U.S. Department of Defense, United States- Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967: Study Prepared by the Department of Defense, book 2., p.1353.

³¹¹ "Saigon 1216 to the Department of State," 24 December 1960, United States - Vietnam Relations, p.1354.

The State Department believes that it is almost as important for your Government to have favorable foreign press relations as it is to have diplomatic recognition from friendly countries. The Department suggests that you continue to have periodic press conferences such as those conducted by Mr. Thuan, that effective use be made of the weekly press conferences of the Directorate General of Information by channeling items of substantive information through that agency for release, that foreign correspondents be permitted to make trips in the country to learn for themselves the nature of the Viet Cong threat, and that Ministers of the Government be available to have open and frank talks with correspondents about the accomplishments and problems of the various Ministries. It is believed that this might be helpful in improving the tone of foreign press articles.³¹²

The State Department's involvement in the public relations activities of Diem and the GVN in December, 1960, was perceived within the Department as a short term intervention. Included in the Department's list of suggested reforms was the establishment of a public relations section in the Vietnamese directorate of information and the suggestion that Diem hire a "good foreign public relations expert in order to develop better press relations."³¹³ It was also suggested, rather ethnocentrically that Diem conduct periodic "fireside chats" to the nation, modeled on Franklin D. Roosevelt's earlier addresses.³¹⁴ Imposing American style campaigning and public relations activities on an uncooperative Southeast Asian regime underscored both the Department's inexperience with public relations and the stop-gap nature of the initiative.

Deterioration in both the quality of Diem's media coverage and the Vietnam Lobby's working relationship with the South Vietnamese embassy began by late 1960 to foster disillusionment among Diem's traditional supporters, including members of Oram. Memoranda from Oram to Diem reporting on the "dramatic reversal of support" for his regime in the American media were accompanied by media evaluations of editorial coverage and content. "The press reaction has been almost consistently in the negative direction", Oram reported in December, as the firm encouraged Diem to adopt a new three point program. Reforms were required, according to Oram, as a "political necessity", as was the expansion of Oram activities and a tour of South Vietnam by Jonas in order to obtain reliable information.³¹⁵

³¹² Dispatch from the Ambassador in Vietnam (Durbrow) to the Department of State," 27 December 1960, Foreign Relations of the United States: 1958- 1960 Vol.1. Vietnam, p.748.

³¹³ "Telegram from the Ambassador in Vietnam (Durbrow) to the Department of State," 15 December 1960, Foreign Relations of the United States, p.734.

³¹⁴ "Memorandum to Diem from Durbrow," 23 December 1960, Foreign Relations of the United States: 1958- 1960 Vol.1. Vietnam, p.748.

³¹⁵ Gilbert Jonas, Ladejinski, Correspondence to Wolf Ladejinski, 5 December 1960, p.1., Oram Papers, A90-39, 35/9.

Wesley Fishel also urged reforms on Diem in April, 1960, informing him that within the United States “a great deal of uneasiness with respect to Vietnam exists today in official and business circles.” The essential focus of domestic criticism of Diem and the GVN was reportedly directed to his government’s unwillingness to delegate authority, which was attributed to a weakness in leadership, slow democratization, the decline in the South’s security situation, and lack of popular support. Of particular concern to Fishel was the scarcity of information available to Diem’s supporters within the United States. According to Fishel, “it is a matter of some pain to us who are your *friends* that your *enemies* are better able to secure detailed information about what is happening in your country than we are!”³¹⁶ Fishel’s intervention was representative of the dislocation and division between Oram, the AFV and Diem, during the final days of the Eisenhower administration.

The discontent and pessimism within the AFV and Oram extended to long-time Diem advocate Wolf Ladejinski. In cables to Jonas, in March, 1960, Ladejinski indicated that the earlier idealized promotion of Diem, allied with the GVN’s lack of reform, democratization, or assistance in its own public relations campaigns, had effectively caused the Diem regime to become indefensible:

I don’t think you can stop or even minimize the anticipated flow of bad articles. Even the friendliest sources must take cognizance of the fact that many chickens have come home to roost. You can’t go on indefinitely preaching one thing and doing something entirely different. Too much of this sort of thing has happened and events have caught up with it. The Communists are only a little bit more numerous than before, but the indifference of the population following last year’s election has grown amazingly. And the Party, as we have known all along, can fight no battles. The situation is serious and much of it will simply have to come into the open.³¹⁷

Ladejinski’s negative prognosis was also reflected later, in May:

Any public relations man working for Vietnam now can’t help but have a devil of a time. My own case is a good example. The good work of the regime is an old and thrice-told story. The bad aspects can no longer be hidden, and they can’t be explained away. It takes little perspicacity to see them and then draw conclusions. The more so since the regime seems to be oblivious to the grave dangers inherent in the situation, and refuses to take advice even from the most loyal of sources. Read my letters to Joe and get the point. You can’t stop the press; some of the stuff is very useful, and it is probably the only

³¹⁶ “Letter from Professor Wesley R. Fishel of Michigan State University to the President of the Republic of Vietnam (Diem),” 30 April 1960, Foreign Relations of the United States: 1958- 1960 Vol.1. Vietnam, p.429.

³¹⁷ “Wolf Ladejinski, Ladejinski, Correspondence to Gilbert Jonas,” 6 March 1960, p.1., Oram Papers, A90-39, 35/9.

way of making a dent in the minds of those who should have realized the political weakness of the regime way, way back.³¹⁸

Within the American Friends of Vietnam and the Vietnam Lobby generally, dissent fostered by a rising awareness of civil liberties repression by Diem and the GVN threatened to fragment the movement. Oram's avenues of communication which had provided sanitized promotional information to its own membership had been overwhelmed by the rise in critical media content. Since mid-1957, in response to negative material in Life and other publications, Oram sought to retain the solidarity of the Vietnam Lobby by countering or qualifying media charges and promising forthcoming reforms from the GVN. By 1960 the disillusionment with the Diem solution had become widespread and included prominent members of Diem's early promotion such as Joseph Buttinger. As one of the first advocates of Diem, Buttinger had been active in supporting Diem's leadership. He had first become involved through the International Rescue Committee and had personally helped found Are We Saving Vietnam? and The American Friends of Vietnam. Buttinger's defection from the Diem camp in 1960 to support South Vietnamese exiles seeking the overthrow of Diem was particularly damaging to the lobby and was indicative of the growing disillusionment within the movement.³¹⁹

In the final days of the Eisenhower administration, Oram struggled to hold together the increasingly tenuous support of the Vietnam Lobby's membership. Within the AFV Executive, concern had earlier been raised that "Diem's horrid treatment of dissident groups" and repression of civil liberties had resulted in a situation in which "the valuable personal reputations of individual Committeemen are being hurt...."³²⁰ By January, 1960, escalating dissension within the organization forced Jonas to write Ladejinski in Saigon urgently requesting information on forthcoming GVN reforms, as the membership was currently "involved in a great deal of soul searching." Privately, the AFV had agreed to await the announcement of reforms; however, the situation, according to Jonas, had deteriorated to the point where evidence and facts were required without delay. The opportunity to "avoid either open criticism or abandonment on the part of our close friends" in Washington, was dependent upon the promise of rapid reforms within Diem's government. Jonas indicated that the situation with those influential friends in Washington would be resolved either way in early February, 1961, "and will to a large degree determine the future of our friends and their support here." Ultimately, Jonas declared that "for the last four

³¹⁸ "Wolf Ladejinski, Ladejinski, Correspondence to Gilbert Jonas," 16 May 1960, p.1., Oram Papers, A90-39, 35/9.

³¹⁹ William Conrad Gibbons, The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War, p.338.

³²⁰ AFV Treasurer to Harold Oram, Correspondence, Monday- undated, p.2., Oram Papers, A90-39 59/7.

months, I have succeeded only in a delaying action, desperately trying to hold back the flood tides that threatened to engulf all we have constructed over the past five years.”³²¹

The consequences of South Vietnam’s deteriorating public relations activities in the United States were finally acknowledged by Diem in 1963 as detrimental to the stability and security of his regime. Recognizing the Chuong’s obstruction and its effect on his regime’s standing among American audiences and networks of supporters, Diem remarked to the United States Ambassador to Vietnam, Henry Cabot Lodge, that “I made a mistake in leaving such a gap in Washington.” Reporting to Washington, Lodge understood Diem to mean “that if [he] had another kind of ambassador, the press and the politicians could have been cultivated so that Vietnam would not find itself with such an unfortunate public opinion.”³²²

Challenged by Chuong’s obstruction and the refusal of the South Vietnamese government to adopt domestic reforms, Oram and the AFV became increasingly ineffective in defending their previously constructed characterizations and stereotypes. Having generated unrealistic standards of conduct for Diem’s administration, earlier promotional activities collapsed as American audiences came to question the ability of the South Vietnamese government to ensure the development of the South or its continued resistance to Communism. Growing domestic opposition to Diem’s leadership expressed among both popular audiences and foreign policy elites provided an important legacy from Eisenhower to the incoming Kennedy administration.

John F. Kennedy’s support for the removal of Diem from office in November, 1963, in response to growing disapproval of Diem’s leadership from the domestic foreign policy community, media, and public was in part a consequence of previous AFV and South Vietnamese promotional activities. In the early 1960’s it became increasingly evident that Diem was both unwilling and unable to accommodate the disparity between the reality of his government and the once carefully constructed American beliefs and expectations. The Government of South Vietnam’s repression of Buddhists and its inability to counter Viet Cong activities also called into question the regime’s effectiveness. Concern within the administration regarding popular American disapproval of Diem’s leadership was highlighted by an interview between Kennedy and Walter Cronkite in September, 1963. Foreshadowing his rejection of the Diem solution, Kennedy declared that, “I don’t think the war can be won unless the people support the effort, and in my

³²¹ Gilbert Jonas, Ladejinski, “Correspondence to Wolf Ladejinski,” 11 January 1961, p.2., Oram Papers, A90-39, 35/8.

³²² Ellen J. Hammer, *A Death in Vietnam*, p.267.

opinion, in the last two months the government has gotten out of touch with the people."³²³ Initially embraced as a vehicle for realizing the anti-Communist potential of South Vietnam, Diem's leadership would ultimately be rejected as detrimental to the continued survival of the Saigon regime.

The Kennedy administration's support for the overthrow of Ngo Dinh Diem significantly escalated the American commitment to South Vietnam, thereby facilitating the subsequent, much greater involvement of the Johnson administration. In the wake of Diem's death, South Vietnam struggled through more than eighteen months of transitional governments ineffectively trying to cope with domestic political, military, economic and social deterioration. "Ironically, Kennedy backed the South Vietnamese generals who overthrew Diem in hopes of bolstering the indigenous counterinsurgency effort. Instead, his complicity in the coup d'etat increased U.S. obligations to South Vietnam and drew America ever deeper into a long, diverse, and misunderstood war."³²⁴

³²³ Michael Maclear, The Ten Thousand Day War: Vietnam: 1945-1975, (Toronto: Methuen, 1981), p.75.

³²⁴ William J. Rust, Kennedy in Vietnam. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1985), p.xii

Conclusion

Throughout his term in office, Diem's reluctance to decentralize authority, to draw anti-Communist opposition members into his government or embrace fundamental commitments to land reform and political democratization remained consistent. Accordingly, dramatic shifts in American understanding of Ngo Dinh Diem between late 1955 and the end of the Eisenhower administration were based upon evolving perceptions derived independently from the true nature and conduct of the Diem regime. Crucially important in shaping initial perceptions were the concerted efforts of the American Friends of Vietnam and Oram, with some assistance from the Central Intelligence Agency and a few third-level officials of the State Department.

Success in promoting the Diem solution to American audiences had, by 1957, convinced the American media and foreign policy establishment that Diem represented a viable, nationalistic liberal democratic protégé of the United States. Idealized in constantly reaffirming terms as the "miracle man" of Southeast Asia, Diem's personalized promotion lent support to greater American involvement in Vietnam. Unfamiliar with South Vietnam and generally lacking access to information not influenced by Oram's vast public relations activities, the American media came to embrace Diem as a great man of history capable of creating a new non-Communist South Vietnamese nation. Thus, by selling Diem's leadership in terms consistent with American values and Cold War orthodoxies, Oram and the American Friends of Vietnam helped raise American awareness of Vietnam issues and encourage stronger commitments to defend South Vietnamese independence. Ironically however, Oram's initial success in promoting Diem helped to undermine the long term viability of his regime. Essentially, the selling of Diem was too successful, with persuasive disillusionment the almost inevitable result.

Oram's idealized promotion of Diem's leadership, largely divorced from the Vietnam leader's beliefs or conduct, resulted in a lingering liability to the stability of the Diem regime. Indeed, depictions of Diem's neutralization of the Communist threat in South Vietnam allowed increasing investigation into the true nature of the South Vietnamese government as higher standards were applied to a more secure American client receiving large amounts of American aid. Increasingly, in the later years of the Eisenhower administration, as the contrast between image and reality of Diem's leadership became more obvious, doubts about his suitability and viability spread even among his earliest supporters.

In the end, the dedicated and systematic promotion of Ngo Dinh Diem shaped the escalating American commitment to South Vietnamese affairs through both its successful

construction of a favorable consensus and the disillusioned backlash resulting from that inflated effort. Diem's promotion had, by mid 1957, firmly established the South Vietnamese cause in the American consciousness as a national security interest after Vietnam's marginalization in 1954 following the French collapse. As described by the Oram public relations machine, Diem seemed a worthy ally - well-intentioned, capable, and durable. But eventually the Oram machinery broke down, and American audiences increasingly perceived Diem's continued governance as damaging to both South Vietnamese and American political success. President Kennedy's November, 1963, decision to support the removal of Diem from office was a direct response to the inability of Diem to reconcile his leadership with his earlier promotion. By then, the Vietnamese leader was ironically perceived as a major threat to the American national interests that his selling had helped so much to articulate and popularize.

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