

The U.S. put Ngo Dinh Diem in power?

Consider the following by William Duiker, who has written widely on communism in Vietnam, on China, and on the American war in Vietnam.

[Excerpts are from *Sacred War: Nationalism and Revolution in a Divided Vietnam* (1995)]

Whether senior officials in the Eisenhower administration were persuaded at that time [1954] that Ngo Dinh Diem provided a possible solution to the problem of Vietnam is doubtful. But Bao Dai apparently thought that this was the case, and by his own account it was for that reason that, despite their mutual antipathy, he offered Diem the prime ministership in the early summer of 1954. Bao Dai was well aware that France was about to withdraw from Vietnam, and he hoped that the appointment of Diem would persuade the United States to step in as the new patron of the projected government in Saigon.¹

[U.S. Chief of Mission Donald] Heath concluded that the U.S. should support Diem, but only because there was “no one else.”]

In Washington, the CIA was equally cautious.

Even General [Lawton] Collins [sent to provide support Diem’s authority] suffered growing doubts about Diem’s capacity to lead, and during the winter of 1954-1955 Collins advised the White House to cooperate with the French in seeking a new prime minister. But Diem had friends in Washington, notably Mike Mansfield, an influential senator from the state of Montana, and Colonel Edward Lansdale, a U.S. military officer who had earlier assisted Ramon Magsaysay in putting down a Communist-led insurgency in the Philippines. Both argued tirelessly that Diem, whatever his weaknesses, was the only Vietnamese politician with the determination and the credentials to wage a successful struggle against communist and preserve an independent government in the South.

The decision to back Diem was not made without misgivings in Washington.

¹ It has been asserted that Diem was picked for the office at the insistence of the United States, but I have seen no evidence to that effect.

