

# *Ngo Dinh Diem*

- nationalist; anti-colonialist; anti-communist
- untainted by French, Japanese, or Viet Minh
- Brave; headstrong; independent
- principled (unflexible integrity); honest
- emphasis on family
- Confucian
- disconnected from Vietnamese affairs; Catholic
- elitist
- stubborn; close-minded; inflexible
- introverted; self-absorbed
- poor listener/compulsive talker
- little instinct for people; little charisma
- intolerant of criticism
- gave preeminence to his family
- Confucian



U.S. aid to South Vietnam (a small price to pay):

1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960
\$322.4	\$377.3	\$392.7	\$242.3	\$249.3	\$253.9 (million)

(More aid than any country except Korea)

Paid for entire cost of army and 80% of other government expenses  
AND annual trade deficit of \$178 million

Early successes led to view of Diem as a "miracle man" and Asia's George Washington - and South Vietnam as a "showcase" and a "spunky Asian country" that was "back on its own feet, thanks to a 'mandarin in a sharkskin suit who's upsetting the Red timetable'"

Economically, "American aid . . . built a castle on sand."

"The only government that can succeed there is a government which is independent of foreign controls and which is really operating on a national basis." (John Foster Dulles)

"[T]he government has tended to treat the population with suspicion or to coerce it and has been rewarded with apathy and resentment. . . . The people have not identified themselves with the Government." (U.S. Embassy, 1960)

# 1956

**French Leave Vietnam**

**U.S. Training South Vietnamese:** MAAG assumes responsibility, from French, for training South Vietnamese forces. Americans also help with building of infrastructure, including schools and farming.

**Military Assistance Advisory Group**

# 1957

**Communist Insurgency in RVN:** Communist insurgent activity in South Vietnam begins. Guerrillas assassinate more than 400 South Vietnamese officials. DRVN “accepts” delay in unification elections and focuses on reforms (particularly land reform) in North Vietnam.

**Terrorist Bombings Rock Saigon:** Thirteen Americans working for MAAG and U.S. Information Service are wounded in terrorist bombings in Saigon.

# 1958

**Southern Insurgency Continued:** North Vietnam forms Group 559 to begin infiltrating cadres and weapons into South Vietnam via the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Infiltrators are Southerners who moved to the North for training. They join Southerners who went underground and a growing group of noncommunist dissidents.

**American Servicemen Killed in Guerilla Attack:** Major Dale R. Buis and Master Sergeant Chester M. Ovnand become the first Americans to die in the Vietnam War when guerillas strike at Bien Hoa.

**Diem Orders Crackdown on Communists, Dissidents**

SOUTHEAST ASIA: "Where the Borders  
Are Less Guarded, the Enemy Harder to Find"

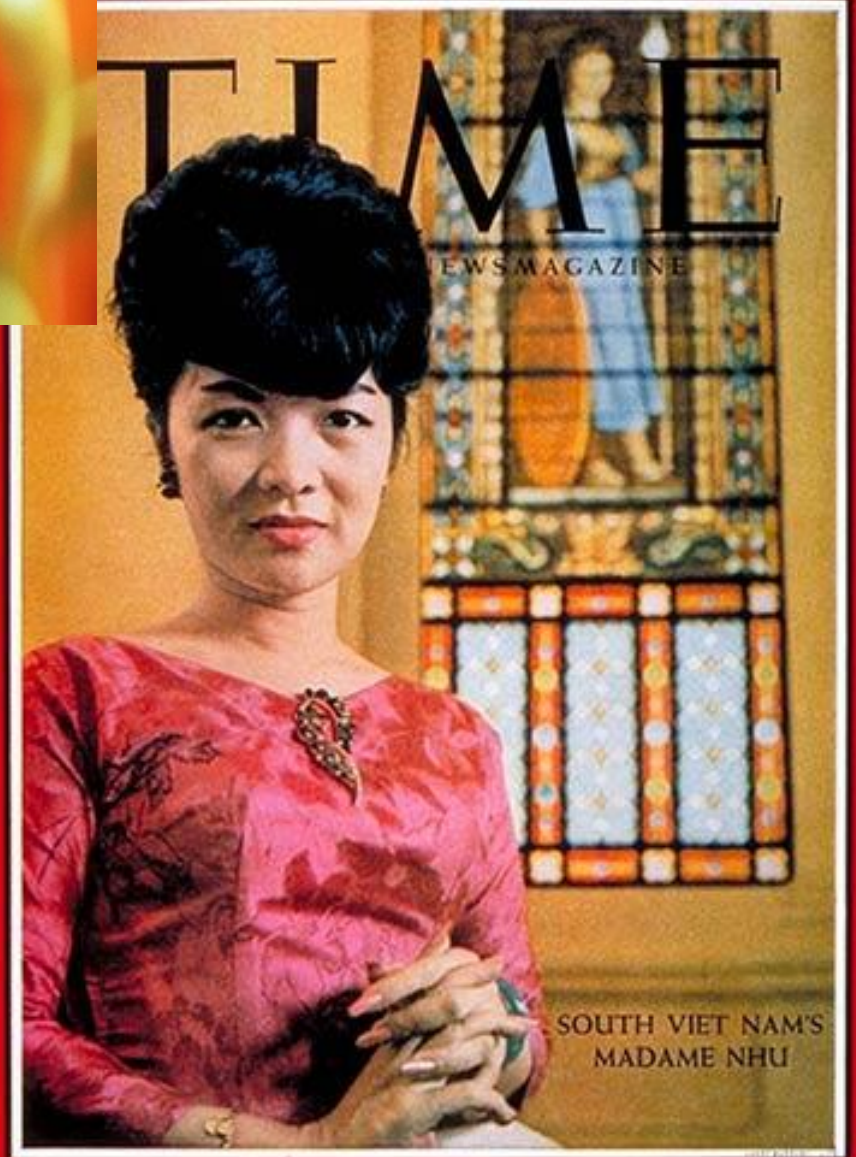


SOUTH VIET NAM'S  
NGO DINH DIEM





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# PHASES OF AN INSURGENCY:

Agitation, proselytizing, organization

Open violence against government, guerrilla operations, establishment of bases

Open warfare, conventional-style army, full-scale set-piece battles



# CRITICAL ELEMENTS FOR AN INSURGENCY:

- Time
- People (= water)
- A cause
- A weak government



# **NECESSARY TO COUNTER AN INSURGENCY:**

- Ground mobility**
- Light infantry**
- Intensive patrolling of populated areas;  
population security**
- Strengthening of government and its  
relationship with the people**

**Guerrillas do not need the support of all or a majority or even a large percentage of the population:**

**2% active support (or less) is all they need if the rest are neutral.**



# Mao Tse-tung

“An ability to run away is the great characteristic of the guerrilla.”

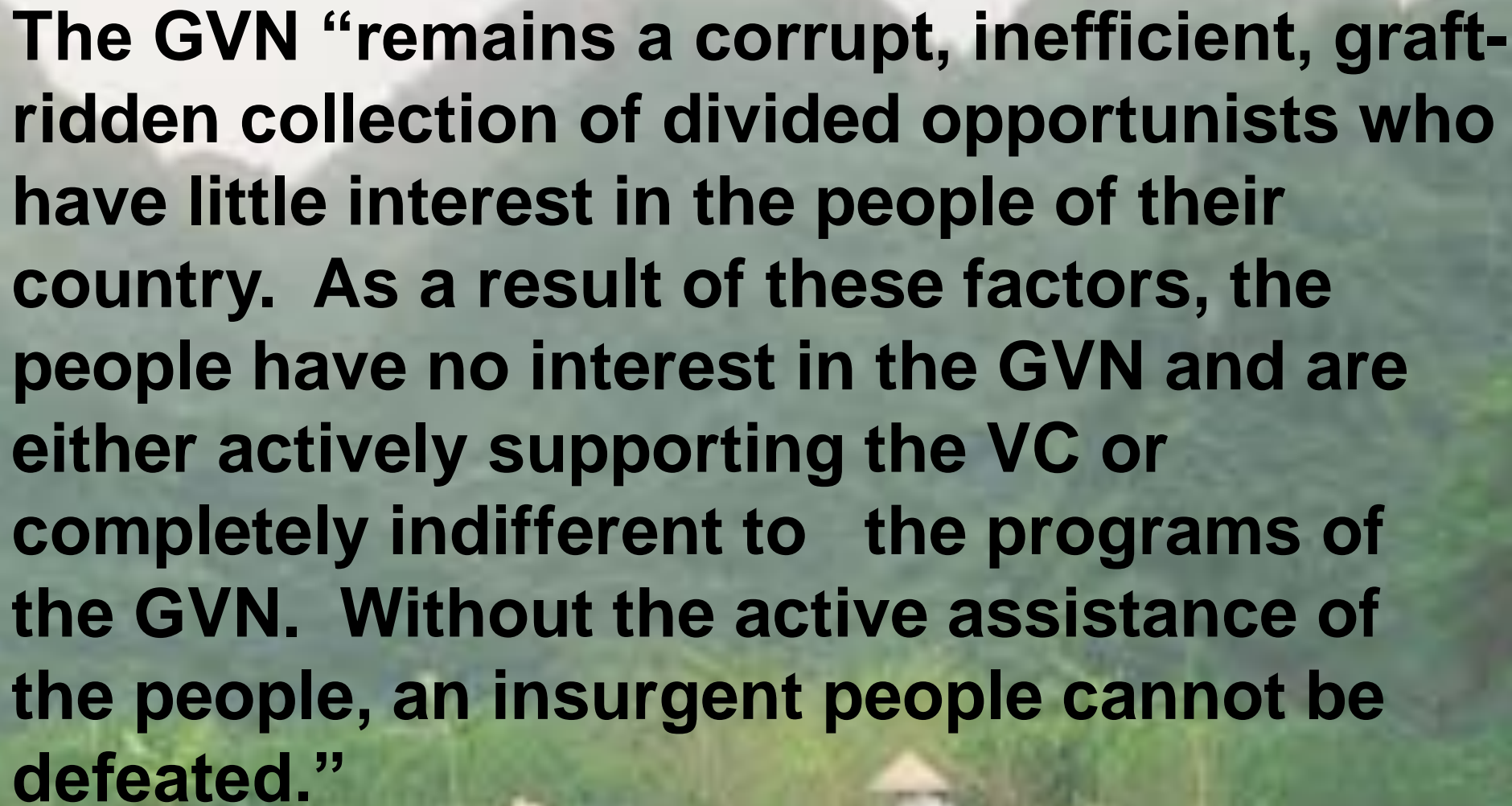
“[T]here is no such thing as a decisive battle” in guerrilla warfare.



**“I am convinced that, even though the National Liberation Front is Communist-dominated, . . . the great majority of the people supporting it are doing so because it is their only hope to change and improve their living conditions.**

**If I were a lad of eighteen faced with the same choice—whether to support the GVN or the NLF—and a member of a rural community, I would surely choose the NLF.”**

*John Paul Vann, adviser in Vietnam (1960s)*

The background of the slide is a blurred photograph of a river scene. In the foreground, two people wearing traditional conical hats are on a boat, likely engaged in fishing or a similar activity. The water is calm, and the background shows lush greenery and distant hills under a slightly overcast sky. The overall tone is peaceful and rural.

**The GVN “remains a corrupt, inefficient, graft-ridden collection of divided opportunists who have little interest in the people of their country. As a result of these factors, the people have no interest in the GVN and are either actively supporting the VC or completely indifferent to the programs of the GVN. Without the active assistance of the people, an insurgent people cannot be defeated.”**

-- *David Hackworth*

**Only in September 1960, after the southern insurgents had begun to take matters into their own hands, did the Third Congress of the VWP approve a program for the violent overthrow of the Diem regime.**

**VERSUS**

**The NLF was “premeditated, planned, organized at length and in detail and then pushed and driven into existence and operations. Such an effort had to be the child of the North.”**



**It was, in a single phrase,**

**an insurgent movement**

**inspired by local conditions in the south  
but guided and directed from Hanoi.**

**It was precisely that ambiguity in the situation  
that later led to the bitter controversy within  
the United States over the origins of the war.**

*-- William Duiker*

**“[T]he source of guerrilla aggression  
[is] in North Vietnam”**

*-- McNamara and Rostow to JFK, Oct. 1961*

**“The loss of South Vietnam would make pointless further discussion about the importance of Southeast Asia to the Free World; we would have to face the near certainty that the remainder of Southeast Asia and Indonesia would move to a complete accommodation with Communism, if not formal incorporation within the Communist bloc.”**

*-- McNamara and Rusk to JFK, Nov., 1961*

# No lessons from the French War?

“[T]hat was the French. They were fighting for a colony, for an ignoble cause.

We’re fighting for freedom, to free them from the Communists, from China, for their independence.”

-- JFK



**“I predict to you that you will,  
step by step, be sucked into  
a bottomless military and political quagmire.”**

*Charles de Gaulle (1961)*

