

- Change = January 20, 1961
 - President John F. Kennedy takes oath of office
 - Inaugural address = mostly Cold War issues
 - Acted on rhetoric
 - Carried people with him
 - War in Vietnam = small in scale
 - JFK = critical of Ike's policies
 - Wanted to multiply military options
 - Believed Cold War shifted
 - Key advisers shared outlook
 - McGeorge Bundy
 - Robert S. McNamara
 - Dean Rusk
 - McNamara = biggest impact of Vietnam policy
 - JFK's view of Southeast Asia
 - Initially more concerned with Laos
 - Pathet Lao vs. Royal Lao gov't
 - » NOTE: PAVN allied with Pathet Lao
 - JFK uses belligerent rhetoric
 - May 1961, Geneva Conference for Laos
 - » JFK decides to negotiate = consequential for Vietnam
 - Lansdale reports to JFK

- JFK moves to increase support
- By Fall 1961, events in SVN had JFK perplexed
 - Varying assessments
 - Also conflicting recommendations
 - In Oct, sent special fact-finding Taylor & Rostow mission
 - » Five recommendations
 - JFK rejects most extreme advice
- Admin selected middle path
- Why? Cold War politics
 - Admin viewed war thru prism of Cold War
 - It =test for supporting non-Communist regimes
 - Failure = detrimental
 - Also partisanship
 - Plus blunders
 - Result = Admin painted into corner
- Shift in visible in Dec 1961
 - A.P.'s Malcome Browne
 - Funding increased
 - Personnel increased
 - Impact = immediate
 - MAAG upgraded to MACV (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam)
 - 1st Commander = Lt. Gen. Paul D. Harkins

- 1961-1962, Admin = more optimistic
 - May 1962, Sec of Def McNamara's 1st trip
 - Hubris: US felt failure = inconceivable
- 1962 Diem's launched *Ấp Chiến lược*
 - It = expansion of agrovillage program
 - Designed with US encouragement
 - Purpose = build bases for gov't
 - Theory: "Hamleted" peasants "protected" from NLF
 - Practice: never functioned as planned
 - Nhu took charge of program
 - Thought: inspiring counter-revolution in countryside
 - Obsessed with numbers
 - 1st project = Operation Sunrise
 - Nhu moved forward rapidly
 - Idea for hamlet based on theories – not realities
 - Result = program pushes peasants to NLF
- 1962 - US advisers attached to ARVN units in field
 - Acquired vivid, low-level view of war
 - Ex. LT Col, John Paul Vann
 - Concludes VC held advantage
 - Worked with Col. Huynh Van Cao

- ARVN = superiority over VC
 - VC armed with light weapons; Used to fighting FR
 - US tech & aggressiveness change war
 - » Ex. Helicopters
 - » Ex. Electronic intelligence
 - » Ex. M-113 APCs
 - » Ex. F-105 Thunderchief
 - Shock effect on VC = great
- Initially Vann convinced ARVN like US army
 - ARVN shaped by history of Vietnam
 - Ex. Colonel Cao
 - » Vann realizes Cao not interested in fighting
 - » Soon VC adapts
 - » Diem NOT pleased
 - » Cao responded to Diem's displeasure
- Battle of Ap Bac
 - Jan 2, 1963 – 7th Infantry moves in
 - US Intel locates VC battalion
 - Colonel Bùi Đình Đạm convinced to engage
 - Võ Văn Kiệt orders men to stay & fight
 - VC dig in

— NOTE: overlook rice paddies

- 1400 ARVN troops sent in
- 15 helicopters total
- VC opened fire
- Deployed ARVN troops quickly demoralized
- US advisers plead with troops to engage – they refused
- Eventually 13 APCs joined battle
- When night fell, VC slipped away
- VC accomplished the impossible
- Battle of Ap Bac revealed:
- US officials spun outcome

— Jan 3, 1963, journalists tour battlefield

— THEN, ARVN unleash artillery barrage

— Vann: outcome = awful

— Gen. Harkins (MACV) = more optimistic

— Result: no lessons learned

— Challenge to Diem

- 1963, discontent spreads
- Diem & Nhu retreat inwards
 - Ex. Diem = “monologist”; Nhu = similar
 - Neither even look at reporter
- Result = Diem’s control undermined by press

- Malcolm Browne, David Halberstam, & Neil Sheehan
- After Ap Bac, press = super critical
- Reports always diverge from public statements
- Doubts reinforced by Buddhist Crisis of 1963
 - Majority = Buddhists
 - Most view Catholics as “tainted”
 - Regime gives preferential treatment
 - Trigger = Decree Number 10
 - May 7, 1963 = Decree invoked on eve of *Vesak*
 - Enforcement causes outrage
 - NOTE: Ngo Dinh Thuc’s 5th Anniversary
 - May 8th, 3000 protest in Hue
 - Thich Tri Quang: “Manifesto of the Monks”
 - Diem denies responsibility
 - » Agrees to compensation - \$7,000 US
 - May 30th, 500 monks demonstrate in Saigon
 - Launch hunger strike organized by Thich Tinh Khiet
 - June 3, nationwide protests erupt
 - Police & ARVN use chemicals Tu Dam Pagoda
 - Diem agree to talks with Buddhist leaders
 - Diệm soften his line in public
 - June 11, Thích Quảng Đức burned himself

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VCEWSSVjrTw>

- Buddhists = rallying point for all
- NOTE: AP reporter Malcom Browne
 - » Photos shock Americans {CLICK}
- Public relations troubles for Diem globally
- Buddhist uprising concerning for JFK Admin
 - JFK – “Who are these people?”
 - Admin split over Diem
 - JFK = can’t decide
 - JFK appoints Henry Cabot Lodge Jr ambassador
 - Lodge = war not winnable with Diem
- Attacks on Buddhists continues
 - Ex. June 15th incident at Xá Lợi Pagoda
 - Ex. critical pamphlets distributed
- Regime tries to silence press
 - Double Seven Day Scuffle
 - Peter Arnett, David Halberstam & Browne
- Raids on pagodas & assaults on press = angered Lodge
- Lodge’s report convinces JFK
 - Lodge wired orders to move
 - Lodge reports to JFK
 - JFK wants guaranteed success

- JFK publically warns Diem & Nhu
 - Sept 2 – interview with Walter Cronkite
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_oQrb8I8hw
- JFK continues fact-finding
 - Two missions to SVN
 - 1) Marine Gen. Victor H. Krulak & diplomat Joseph A. Mendenhall
 - 2) McNamara & Gen. Maxwell D Taylor (chairman of Joint Chiefs)
- Fall of Diem
 - Oct 1963 – parade for Diem’s anniversary
 - Symbolized gulf between regime & reality
 - US gather intel on plot against Diem
 - CIA operator Lucien Conein = pivotal
 - Contacts group led by General Dương Văn Minh
 - Minh moves when Buddhist Crisis erupted
 - Meets with Lodge Sept 1963
 - Also meets with McNamara & Taylor
 - Diem & Nhu heard rumors
 - 1st, try to outwit generals with fake plot
 - 2nd, reached out to Hanoi
 - 3rd appease Lodge with trip to Dalat
 - But, ran out of time
 - Nov 1st coup against Diem unfolds

- NOTE: Nov 1st also day for Diem's fake plot
- Minh & co-conspirators aware
 - » Trick Diem with false VC report
- Oct 31 - 3 ARVN task forces move gather on outskirts
- Nov 1st – noon – rebels advance into city
 - » Wore red scarves; catch loyalists off guard
- Central police call Diem
- Rebels seized key buildings & airport
- All communications off the air
- Diệm & Nhu suspect something amiss
- Generals phoned Diem with ultimatum
- Diem reaches General Trần Văn Đôn
- At 4:30pm, coup announced over radio
- Diem reaches out to Lodge, but no help
- Diem held out until early Nov 2
- Minh's plan: broadcast ceremonial handover of power broadcast
- BUT, Diem & Nhu = gone
- Brothers flight = short lived
- Reaction to Coup = mixed
 - JFK = shocked & saddened
 - Lodge concluded he accomplished mission
 - Gen. Harkins reported concerned for the devil you don't know

- US policy in Vietnam at impasse
 - In days before JFK's assassination, no sign of any major shift
 - What if JFK lived?
 - Study after study!
 - Yet, increased involvement
 - Result = successor stuck
- Lyndon Baines Johnson = 36th POTUS
 - JFK shot by Oswald in Dallas
 - SVN not LBJ's priority
 - He = well aware of US position
 - PLUS, was cold-warrior
 - But wanted to "temporize" SVN
 - Focus = domestic agenda
 - Relied heavily on McNamara
 - McN returned to SVN 12/19/63
 - Attitude changed
 - Advised US must act soon
 - SVN Deteriorates
 - Gen. Minh & co. = less competent than Diem & Nhu
 - » Were of older generation
 - » Contemplated negotiating with NLF
 - Initial optimism for new regime turned to fear

- DC encourages another coup
- Jan 30, 1964, Gen. Nguyen Khanh takes power
- Khanh's gov't = US-trained ARVN officers
 - Bitterly opposed to negotiations
 - Favored intensification of war
 - Peak of US enthusiasm = Spring of 1964
 - McNamara returns to Saigon
 - Khanh proved to be disappointment
 - Khanh & co. spent time fighting each other
- View from Hanoi
 - Ho & co. plotted strategy
 - All realized NLF not widely supported
 - Assumed LBJ would maintain US commitment to SVN
 - Sent small team South to assess situation
 - Group traveled by Ho Chi Minh Trail
 - Trip = arduous; took 5 weeks
 - Conclude NLF can't win on own
 - Hanoi accepted recommendations
 - Reordered priorities
 - Dispatched NVA units south
 - NVA fused into VC battalions
 - Improved Ho Chi Minh Trail

- Used shipping lands
- Plan: use VC to chew up ARVN – then trigger rebellion
- Needed support from CCP & USSR

- View from DC
 - DC soon realized tide of war turning
 - Frustration with Khanh gov't & ARVN
 - LBJ sent mixed messages

 - Admin's new focus revealed in Spring 1964
 - McNamara develops "wars of national liberation"
 - Gen. William C. Westmoreland replaces Harkins
 - Gen. Maxwell Taylor replaces Lodge
 - Both reorganized US effort in Vietnam
 - Admin waited for right moment to move