The Liberal Savior as Conservative: John F. Kennedy's Foreign Policy

By Jeremy Kuzmarov

"The glory of the next Augustan age
Of a power leading from its strength
and pride
Of young ambition eager to be
tried…" – Robert Frost, poem read at Kennedy inaugural.

"While treaty arrangements and international law are to be given careful consideration, there is no overriding bar to [clandestine] action when overriding national interests prevail….when a government that is inimical to U.S. interests emerges, risks should be evaluated in encouraging and supporting the overthrow of that government." – Robert W. Komer, a member of Kennedy's Special Group on Counter-Insurgency.

The presidential candidacy of Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has triggered a revival of what can only be called the "John F Kennedy Cult," whose followers not only idealize John F. Kennedy but have retrospectively transformed him into the figure they would have wanted him to be. Proponents of the cult have suggested, against a mountain of evidence, that JFK was a pacifist and anti-imperialist and that his administration represented a complete break from what came before and after him.

Even before RFK Jr. announced his run for the presidency in June 2023, the groundwork had already being laid for a "reappraisal" of his uncle's administration as being more liberal and progressive than previously given credit for—most influentially by Oliver Stone and Peter Kuznick in their award-winning, twelve-part television documentary series, *The Untold History of the United States*[1], which aired in 2012 and was watched by millions. The book version was also read by millions. In 2022, historian and author Aaron Good (who was mentored by Stone and Kuznick) attempted to further reshape the contours of JFK's administration in his book, *American Exception: Empire and the Deep State*, in which he represented JFK's short reign as a "brief departure from the imperial consensus."[2]

Good wrote that "upon inheriting his predecessors' "legacy of ashes," President John F. Kennedy "pursued policies that represented a serious threat to the American 'deep state.'" Ironically, Good undermines his own argument when he acknowledges that the Kennedy administration was permeated by the "deep state," with twenty-six high ranking Kennedy officials having previously worked for the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, which funded CIA front

[1] See my review of Stone and Kuznick's book: https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/149562. The book overall has many praiseworthy attributes and is a good resource, but has some shortcomings and the authors seem to lose their critical thinking capability when discussing JFK.

[2] Aaron Good, *American Exception: Empire and the Deep State* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2022), 137, 138, 139. Anthony Gronowicz, in an otherwise brilliant study of U.S. imperialism, echoes Good in claining that John F. Kennedy represented a "presidential exception to the white protestant dynastic drive for global domination first articulated by Presidents Washington and Adams." The only truthful aspect to the claim is that Kennedy was not part of a protestant dynasty as he was the first Catholic president. Anthony Gronowicz, *The Last Western Empire: A History of U.S. Foreign Policy* (Koba Books, 2021),

organizations[3] and had no intention of ending the Vietnam War or renouncing imperialism as an instrument of U.S. foreign policy. But such inconvenient facts against the apotheosis of JFK as liberal savior are dismissed by cult acolytes as unimportant—as they were dismissed by Good—or, more usually never discussed at all.

Documentaries like Stone's, or an occasional book by someone like Good, might not, by themselves, have been enough to inspire the current reawakened nostalgia for the "magical time of Camelot," let alone persuaded independent historians that JFK was something other than what the historical record very clearly shows him to be. What it took was Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s presidential campaign, which kicked off with RFK Jr. giving a foreign policy address on the 60th anniversary of a foreign policy speech that JFK gave in which he advocated for détente with the Soviet Union. In his speech RFK Jr. reminded us how today's military provocations by the U.S. towards Russia have put the world at risk of nuclear war in a manner similar to its risk during the October 1962 Cuban missile crisis. He further reminded us of how his uncle had traveled around the country urging Americans to put themselves in Russian shoes and try to see things from their point of view.[4]

That 1962 foreign policy speech was a high point of JFK's short presidency, offering hope for a thaw in the Cold War, which was dashed when Lyndon B. Johnson escalated the Vietnam War. However, it is often forgotten that Kennedy followed that speech with other speeches reaffirming a commitment to the Cold War and responded coolly afterwards to Soviet Premier Nikita Krushchev's proposal for a non-aggression pact between the NATO and Warsaw Pact countries that would freeze or cut defense budgets and reduce the number of foreign troops in West and East Germany, whose deployment had antagonized Russia and caused it to erect the Berlin Wall.[5]

RFK Jr's campaign advisors hoped that by scheduling his 2023 foreign policy speech on the anniversary of JFK's famous 1962 foreign policy speech, he would inspire nostalgia and powerfully conflate their two images in the public mind. And perhaps it did, but more explicit appeals to nostalgia for JFK were on the schedule. They hit their apogee on Super Bowl Sunday 2024. During the half-time break of what was the most watched television program of the year, and perhaps in history (with 123.4 million people tuned in across multiple platforms, including CBS, Paramount+, Univision and Nickelodeon), an RFK Jr. Super PAC paid $7 million to air a campaign commercial that reprised JFK's famous TV campaign commercial of 1960, into which pictures of RFK Jr. had been inserted.[6]

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[3] Good, *American Exception,* 137, 138, 139.

[4] See Jeremy Kuzmarov, "Attacks on RFK Jr. as a "Conspiracy Theorist" Show All the Hallmarks of CIA Disinformation," *CovertAction Magazine*, July 12, 2023, https://covertactionmagazine.com/2023/07/12/attacks-on-rfk-jr-as-a-conspiracy-theorist-show-all-the-hallmarks-of-cia-disinformation/

[5] Bruce Miroff, *Pragmatic Illusions: The Presidential Politics of John F. Kennedy* (New York: David McKay Company, 1976), 104. Heralded by some writers as gods gift to speeches, the American University speech had visionary features but also significant limtations as Kennedy a) promoted anticommunist themes; b) offered a defense of American intervention in Congo and elsewhere; c) criticized a Soviet publication for having the audacity to criticize the U.S. for seeking world domination by waging aggressive wars—which the U.S. was actually doing; and d) called for changes in communist bloc countries without suggesting the need for any change Western, capitalist societies.

[6] https://av24.org/superbowl/

But could the strategy of identifying the ultra-liberal Robert F. Kennedy Jr. with the much more conservative John F. Kennedy backfire? RFK Jr. says he is for cutting the Pentagon budget, closing U.S. overseas military bases, restricting fossil fuel exploitation of the environment, ending imperialistic wars (at least those not involving Israel) and refraining from interfering in foreign elections or overthrowing foreign governments. But JFK would not have endorsed any of those policies, especially closing U.S. overseas military bases, refraining from interfering in foreign elections or overthrowing foreign governments, which he did on multiple occasions. Journalist Richard J. Walton called John F. Kennedy "the great counterrevolutionary of the postwar world,"[7] which is not how he is being remembered by RFK Jr. and his supporters today.

Good in *American Exception* claims that Kennedy supported Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, who had wanted to nationalize Congo's resources and that Kennedy was dismayed by Lumumba's assassination. But this is contradicted by the latest scholarship on the topic.[8] Good also states that Kennedy had more sympathy for African independence leaders than did Eisenhower. But Good fails note that Kennedy, as an an ardent anticommunist, meddled extensively in African countries in support of "independent" African leaders who would *not* be independent of U.S. interests—even when, as was almost always the case, they harmed that country's people. Kennedy also colluded with mining firms working in liaison with Wall Street financiers and the CIA to undermine African leaders who put the interest of their people above those of the U.S., such as Antoine Gizenga in Congo and Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana.[9]

Good and other subscribers to the Camelot myth suggest that JFK's policies were a "divergence from those that Eisenhower and Johnson pursued in key areas of the world such as the USSR, Cuba, Southeast Asia and the Third World." Good claims that JFK "resisted advice from his military commanders to start hot wars in Cuba, Laos, Berlin and Vietnam, pursued backchannel diplomacy and ordered a complete withdrawal from Vietnam." But although some aspects of this analysis are true—Kennedy did conduct backchannel diplomacy with Cuba and the Soviet Union and did resisted the urging of his generals to start hot wars. But it was no major "departure" from the policies of Dwight Eisenhower; he too resisted starting new hot wars, as during the Suez crisis, for example, when he threatened to withhold U.S. financial assistance and oil supplies from Britain, France and Israel unless they backed off their invasion of Egypt.[10] Eisenhower also adopted a far more even-handed foreign policy when it came to the Arab-Israeli conflict, compared to either Kennedy's or Johnson's thumb-on-the-scales bias in favor of Israel. Eisenhower was neither reluctant nor afraid to impose sanctions on Israel, as he did in 1953 and

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[7] Richard J. Walton, *Cold War and Counter-Revolution: The Foreign Policy of John F. Kennedy* (New York: The Viking Press, 1972), 233. Historian Herbert Parmet characterized Kennedy as a "moderate conservative."
[8] See Susan Williams, *White Malice: The CIA and the Covert Recolonization of Africa* (New York: Public Affairs, 2021), 402. See also Seymour M. Hersh, *The Dark Side of Camelot* (Boston: Little Brown & Company, 1997), 3.
[9] Williams, *White Malice.*
[10] See David A. Nichols, *Eisenhower 1956: The President's Year of Crisis—Suez and the Brink of War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012). Eisenhower even threatened a run on the British pound.

again during the 1956-57 Suez crisis; he even threatened Israel with expulsion from the UN.[11] (Imagine Biden daring to issue such an ultimatum to Netanyahu.)

In *JFK: The Presidency of John F. Kennedy,* Herbert Parmet shows how Kennedy accelerated efforts to destroy Fidel Castro after the Cuban Missile crisis, even as he was engaged in backchannel diplomacy with Castro supposedly aimed at achieving friendlier relations.[12] Parmet also points out that the much-touted nuclear test ban treaty adopted by JFK—given as an example of Kennedy's supposed commitment to world peace after the Cuban Missile crisis—was meaningless as neither the Soviets or Americans had been testing nuclear weapons since 1958.[13] The treaty further had a loophole that allowed nuclear testing underground, which the Kennedy adminstration planned to carry out.[14]

According to historian Thomas G. Paterson, Kennedy embraced the worldview of former Secretary of State Dean Acheson, a key driver of U.S. foreign policy in the postwar era, who told him that in final analysis "the U.S. was the locomotive at the head of mankind, the rest of the world the caboose."[15] This imperialistic mindset helped Kennedy to rationalize widescale efforts to subvert left-leaning or communist governments and to try and put down revolutionary movements that Kennedy misrepresented as being guided by Moscow and/or Beijing.[16] Kennedy established special warfare schools in Panama, Okinawa, Vietnam and West Germany, and expanded upon Eisenhower's covert police training programs that were designed to uphold U.S. strategic proxies and were used as a front for covert paramilitary operations.[17] In three years, the

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[11] Stephen Green, *Taking Sides: America's Secret Relations With Militant Israel* (New York: William & Morrow, 1984); Yaacov Bar Simon Tov, "The United States and Israel Since 1948: A 'Special Relationship'?" *Diplomatic History*, 22, 2 (Spring 1998), 234.

[12] Herbert Parmet, *JFK: The Presidency of John F. Kennedy* (New York: Doubleday, 1983); Thomas C. Reeves, *A Question of Character: A Life of John F. Kennedy* (New York: Forum, 1997), 9. James W. Douglass, who subscribes to the view that Kennedy underwent a spiritual transformation following the Cuban Missile crisis and began to support peace, acknowledges that Kennedy succombed to Cold War pressures *after* his famous American University speech, and on June 19, 1963 "approved a CIA program of sabotage and harassment against targets in Cuba that included electric power, transportation, oil and manufacturing facilities." James W. Douglass, *JFK and the Unspeakable: Why He Died and Why It Matters* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008), 66. Douglass wrote of Kennedy's support for a modified Operation Mongoose at that time.

[13] Parmet, *JFK*, 95. The negotiator, Averell Harriman, was a Cold War hawk who was the son of robber baron E.H. Harriman and founder of a leading Wall Street investment firm, Brown Brothers Harriman, which acted as a financial operating base for pro-Nazi industrialists who helped finance Hitler in the 1930s. The firm employed Prescott Bush, George H.W. Bush's father.

[14] Hersh, *The Dark Side of Camelot*, 362-365. Seymour Hersh emphasizes that the move for a Test Ban treaty and thaw in the Cold War was undertaken by Kennedy out of strategic and political calculatiuon coning at a time when the U.S. had great advantage in the arms race. Kennedy had helped provoke the Cuban missile crisis and shaped the public mood by which the public favored a cooling of tensions that he presented himself as being poised to deliver after standing Kruschchev down during the missile crisis. According to Hersh, this was all political theater designed to secure Kennedy's reelection in 1964.

[15] *Kennedy's Quest For Victory: American Foreign Policy, 1961-1963*, ed. Thomas G. Paterson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 11.

[16] Richard J. Walton, *Cold War and Counter-Revolution: The Foreign Policy of John F. Kennedy* (New York: The Viking Press, 1972),

[17] See Jeremy Kuzmarov, *Modernizing Repression: Police Training and Nation Building in the American Century* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012). The creation of the special warfare schools are discussed in Arthur Schlesinger Jr. *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 341.

Kennedy administration authorized 163 major covert operations—only seven fewer than had been conducted under Eisenhower in eight years.[18]

Many of these covert operations were carried out in Vietnam which was transformed under Kennedy into a human laboratory for counterinsurgency techniques that were then in fad, including computerized surveillance and an identity card program designed to enhance population control efforts; chemical warfare to destroy jungle cover, and the deadly Strategic Hamlet program whose aim was to isolate the nationalist guerrillas so their villages could be bombed.[19] David W. Conde, author of the suppressed 1970 book, *CIA Core of the Cancer*, wrote that "if the world is looking for the war criminal responsible for the war in Vietnam, it is John F. Kennedy" as "it was he who replaced U.S. advisers with U.S. troops and American reconnaissance planes with B-52 bombers," and it was "Kennedy's 'crush the people's war theory' that led to the expansion of the CIA and to the making of the war in Vietnam."[20]

Good and others with his perspective make it seem like Kennedy had limited real power and was a good guy fighting a lone battle against corrupt elements in the Pentagon and CIA when Kennedy was a James Bond admirer that kept a replica of a Green Beret on his desk, was enthralled by the U-2 spy plane, and actively supported an expansion of CIA and military budgets.[21] Historian Bruce Miroff details how in March 1961, Kennedy asked for $2.4 billion beyond the budgetary figure that the Eisenhower administration had deemed sufficient for American security, the first of three requests for additional defense expenditures that totaled $17 billion by the time of his death. The bulk of the funds were to go to increases in the production of the Polaris Minuteman and skybolt missile systems—despite knowledge of a substantial lead in strategic weapons by the U.S. over the Soviet Union. Miroff wrote that while at times Kennedy spoke of the folly of the arms race, his adminstration initiated what aide Theodore Sorenson described as "the most rapid [military] buildup in American peacetime history.'"[22]

This buildup was being expanded upon at the time of Kennedy's death when his administration was planning to increase U.S. missile strength over the Soviets to over 1700 by

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[18] Stephen G. Rabe, "Alliance For Progress," *Oxford Encyclopedia*, https://oxfordre.com/latinamericanhistory/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.001.0001/acrefore-9780199366439-e-95; Peter Kuznick and Oliver Stone, *An Untold History of the United States* (New York: Gallery Books, 2012), 295.

[19] See Noam Chomsky, *Rethinking Camelot* (Boston: South End Press, 2003); Kuzmarov, *Modernizing Repression.*

[20] Jeremy Kuzmarov, "Meet a Forgotten CIA Critic Who Presciently Characterized the Agency as a Cancer in a 1970 Book," *CovertAction Magazine*, April 17, 2023, https://covertactionmagazine.com/2023/04/17/meet-a-forgotten-cia-critic-who-presciently-characterized-the-agency-as-a-cancer-in-1970-book/

[21] Parmet, *JFK*, 211, 213.

[22] Miroff, *Pragmatic Illusions,* 49, 50. See also Walton, *Cold War and Counter-Revolution,* 60-73. James N. Giglio reported in *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy*, 2nd ed. (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2000), 48, that after his inauguration Kennedy quickly increased the defense budget by 15 percent, doubled the number of combat ready divisions in the army's strategic reserve, and expanded combat units in the Navy and Marines. In early 1961, Giglio writes that Kennedy "instructed the Special Warfare Center at Fort Bragg, North Carolina to include the study of new methods of combating guerrilla warfare. The Special Forces personnel at Fort Bragg increased from fewer then 1,000 to 12,000 in his administration. By June 1963, some 118,000 American and 7,000 foreign military officers had undergone counterinsurgency training, as did foreign service officers before embarking on third world assignments.

1966.[23] Historian Edwin E. Moise points out in "JFK and the Myth of Withdrawal" that Kennedy allocated the huge sum of $55.4 billion to the military in FY 1964 before his assassination.[24] Noting that defense expenditures increased by 13% during Kennedy's presidency, Thomas G. Paterson emphasized that Kennedy used the military at a greater rate than any other post World War II president to that point, instituting 39 military intervention in three years compared with 35 for Harry S. Truman in seven yars, and averaging 13 military interventions per year compared to four per year under Truman, 7 under Eisenhower, 9 under Lyndon Johnson and 5 under Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford.[25]

Kennedy is often credited with averting the Cuban missile crisis, but Miroff emphasizes that his administration provoked the crisis and used it to get the Russians to acquiesce to the exiasting American nuclear lead—which made the possibility of a thaw strategically advantageous to the U.S.[26] The real Kennedy had never been a crusader for justice, but rather a playboy from a privileged background who was derisively referred to by Eleanor Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman in the 1940s as a "gutless wonder."[27] Hubert Humphrey, Kennedy's rival, called Kennedy's 1960 presidential campaign "the most highly financed, the most plush, the most extravagant in the history of politics in the U.S."[28] On foreign policy issues, Kennedy ran to Nixon's right, constantly extolling his anticommunist virtues, and was obsessed with defeating "wars of national liberation" in the Third World, which the New Frontiersman considered to be sponsored by the Soviet Union and China.[29] Historian Marc Selverstone, wrote that Kennedy "never relinquished his interest in brushfire wars, nor did he dampen his rhetoric about their necessity. He continued to operate from a worldview that embraced the precepts of domino thinking…and the demonstration of resolve."[30]

Part of the historical distortions advanced by Camelot mythologists stems from a misunderstanding of the Kennedy assassination. Many in the JFK research community believe that Kennedy was killed because of his liberal or antiwar politics. But as I have detailed in a lengthy investigative piece in *CovertAction Magazine*, the Kennedy assassination appears to have been carried out as a palace coup by Vice President Lyndon Johnson primarily because Johnson was going to be removed from the Democratic Party ticket in the 1964 election and exposed in the media for rampant corruption going back to his days as a Texas Congressman. A desperate Johnson saved his career by coordinating the Kennedy assassination with Texas

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[23] Miroff, *Pragmatic Illusions*, 165. Miroff emphasizes that though Kennedy signed a nuclear test ban treaty with the Soviets following the Cuban missile crisis, Kennedy deliberately excluded underground explosions from the ban. Afterwards, the U.S. launched an expanded testing program underground.
[24] Edwin E. Moise, "JFK and the Myth of Withdrawal," In *A Companion to the Vietnam War*, ed. Marilyn B. Young and Robert Buzzanco (UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 163.
[25] *Kennedy's Quest For Victory*, ed. Paterson, 5.
[26] Miroff, *Pragmatic Illusions,* 165.
[27] David Talbott, *Brothers: The Hidden History of the Kennedy Years* (New York: Free Press, 2007), 36.
[28] John Dickerson, Louise Dufresne, "JFK Defends Extravagent Campaign Spending in 1960," *CBS News*, June 11, 2015, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/jfk-defends-extravagant-campaign-spending-in-1960/
[29] See eg. David Burner, *John F. Kennedy and a New Generation* (Boston: Little & Brown, 1988) and Senator John F. Kennedy, *The Strategy of Peace*, ed. Allan Nevins (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960).
[30] Marc Selverstone, *The Kennedy Withdrawal: Camelot and the American Commitment to Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022)*,* 245.

powerbrokers, Ed Clark and D.H. Byrd, who had invested in Johnson's political career and saw him as a ticket to their personal enrichment.[31]

Aside from their distortion of the historical record, misrepresentation of Kennedy's foreign policy are significant because it gets to the heart of the question many people are asking as far as what needs needs to be done to affect real social change. Since Kennedy died, American foreign policy has gone off the rails and American society has gone into decline. It is natural as such to want to look at Kennedy's presidency nostalgically, and as a time of innocence lost—something RFK Jr is clearly trying to exploit. Kennedy displayed magnetic qualities as a leader that his successors have lacked, adopted some sensible policies, certainly domestically where the economy boomed under his presidency, and showed capacity for personal maturation and change.[32] The Kennedy historical revisionism is dangerous nevertheless because it creates a false messiah and obscures the structural-economic forces that have corrupted American government, including during Kennedy's presidency. Progressives should in turn recognize that hope for real change lies in the development of mass-based social movements, which strive to transform the country's political-econmic system from below and change the way in which elections are run.

The Anti-Henry Wallace

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[31] Jeremy Kuzmarov, "60 Years After JFK's Death It Is More and More Apparent that Kennedy Was a Victim of a Palace Coup—Spearheaded by Vice-President Johnson," *CovertAction Magazine*, November 22, 2023, https://covertactionmagazine.com/2023/11/22/60-years-after-jfks-death-it-is-more-and-more-apparent-that-kennedy-was-a-victim-of-a-palace-coup-spearheaded-by-vice-president-lyndon-b-johnson/. The corruption included Johnson's involvement in political murder. Jeremy Kuzmarov, "Was LBJ a 'Serial Killer' Who Advanced His Career By Murdering at Least 6 Other Men Who Stood in His Way?" *CovertAction Magazine*, February 6, 2023, https://covertactionmagazine.com/2023/02/06/was-lbj-a-serial-killer-who-advanced-his-career-by-murdering-at-least-6-other-men-who-stood-in-his-way/. Byrd was among those to oppose Kennedy's efforts to repeal the oil depletion allowance, a tax subsidy for oil companies, which was one of Kennedy's more progressive domestic policy initiatives. Disaffected elements of the U.S. Air Force and CIA also appear to have been involved in coordinating the Kennedy assassination, which Johnson quarterbacked, but probably because they had personal grievances with Kennedy and felt they would enjoy greater opportunity under a new president. Edward Lansdale, for example, hated Kennedy because Kennedy had supported the overthrow and assassination of South Vietnamese leader Ngo Dinh Diem, whom Lansdale had been close with. Lansdale had been pushed out of government before Kennedy was killed but had his career resurrected under Lyndon Johnson. Other CIA officers involved in the assassination/coup plot resented that Kennedy was bypassing the Agency in coordinating covert operations—which he rather zealousy supported—through the Special Group on Counterinsurgency in which Bobby Kennedy was a dominating figure (whom they thought was young and arrogant), and using the Green Berets, and feared that the Kennedy's were establishing a political dynasty. They were also bitter over Kennedy's mishandling of the Bay of Pigs and failure to provide air support and back a full-fledged invasion of Cuba.[31] However, Eisenhower and probably Nixon would have done the same thing because a military invasion of Cuba was impractical and could have easily backfired politically, which was Kennedy's main reason for rejecting it—rather than him being sympathetic in any way to the Cuban revolution.

[32] Those policies included: establishing tax incentives that encouraged the growth of manufacturing industry, standing up against Big Steel, expanding public housing and other Truman-era Fair Deal programs, establishing minimum wage, and repealing the oil depletion allowance. For a favorable view of Kennedy's presidency, see Donald Gibson, *Battling Wall Street: The Kennedy Presidency* (L.A.: Progressive Press, 2018). Some aspects of Gibson's analysis are undermined in Miroff's book, *Pragmatic Illusions*, and other books critical of Kennedy's foreign policies, like Walton's *Cold War and Counter-Revolution*. Miroff shows how Kennedy was a prototypical "corporate liberal" who extolled the virtues of free enterprise and adopted a cool response to Senator George McGovern's proposal to reopen the question of inequality with the American public. Kennedy's economic policy focused on pushing for a trade expansion act over calls for a medicare bill and set tax privileges for corporate investors in place.

Kennedy's conservative foreign policies and commitment to the Cold War are not surprising in light of his privileged background. Kennedy's father, Joseph Sr. was a millionaire real estate investor and banker from a prominent Boston political dynasty known as "the wolf of Wall Street" who served as U.S. ambassador to England on the eve of World War II. Ranking twelfth among America's ruling families by *Fortune Magazine* in 1957 with wealth estimated at between $200 and $400 million, Joseph Kennedy Sr. bankrolled and stage managed JFK's political career from the beginning, giving his son publicity by publishing his Harvard senior thesis into a book and hiring prominent journalist John Hersey, to write a story in *Reader's Digest* embellishing his war record and heroism.[33]

During JFK's first run for Congress in Massachusetts at age 29, Joe Sr. bragged that "with the money he was spending, he could elect his chauffeur to Congress." JFK's district was plastered with Kennedy billboards, posters and stickers, and political advertisements flooded the newspapers, which devoted considerable non-commercial space to JFK thanks to Joe's contacts.[34] According to journalist John H. Davis, JFK had "no central core to his beliefs" and did very little to distinguish himself in the early phase of his political career except as a playboy. Inheriting a fiscal conservatism from his father,[35] JFK's main policy focus was on getting low cost housing for veterans and backing Harry S. Truman in his opposition to the anti-labor Taft-Hartley bill.[36] Kennedy's support for labor rights only went so far, however, as he cautioned labor unions against adopting policies that could lead to a "war between management and labor," championed watered down and at times anti-labor legislation, did not show up for votes on progressive legislation, and railed against the takeover of unions by communists, including one led by one of his former Harvard professors.[37] At an informal Harvard seminar in 1950, Kennedy

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[33] John H, Davis, *The Kennedy's: Dynasty and Disaster, 1848-1984* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1985), 153; Victor Lasky, *Robert F. Kennedy: The Myth and the Man* (New York: Trident Press, 1968), 46; Victor Lasky, *JFK: The Man and the Myth* (New York: The McMIllan Company, 1963), 39. According to Lasky, the Kennedy fortune rated well ahead of the individual Rockefellers, the Henry Fords, the Pews, the Harrimans, and the Whitneys. Lasky wrote that "when it came to realizing his life dream—a Kennedy in the White House—Father Joe spared no expense. In early 1960, *Newsweek* quoted Adlai Stevenson as saying that 'the amount of money being spent by the Kennedys is phenomenal, probably the highest amount spent on a campaign in history.'"

[34] Lasky, *JFK*, 97.Lasky quoted a friend of JFK's who said that "Jack was all over, on the streets, on the radio, on the billboards, in the newspapers….His old man spent so much, you couldn't guess how much…Everything his father got, he bought and paid for. And politics is like war. It takes three thingw to win, The first is money, and the second is money and the third is money."

[35] Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy*, 126, 128. Giglio emphasizes how Kennedy listened far more to his conservative economic advisers than Harvard economist John Keneth Galbraith, who was more liberal and generally ignored.

[36] Davis, *The Kennedy's*, 167, 168. Justice William O. Douglas said that JFK embraced "nothing of consuming interest" and "never seemed to get into the mainstream of any tremendous political thought or political action, or [to have] any idea of promoting this, or reforming that, nothing." Averill Harriman was among those to consider Joseph P. Kennedy an "unprincipled speculator determined to buy the Democratic presidential nomination for his son."

[37] Frederik Logevall, *JFK: Coming of Age in the American Century* (New York: Random House, 2000), 446, 450; Lasky, *JFK*, 268. The professor's name was Russ Nixon and he had given Kennedy a B- in his course. He was a representative of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America. Kennedy red baited him when he appeared before the education and reform committee, suggesting that communists were central in his union's leadership. When Kennedy asked Nixon whether he thought communism was a threat to the American political and economic system, Nixon replied no, that the real threat was "our failure to meet some of the basic economic problems of the people in a democratic way" and "our failure year after year to expand the basic civil rights of our people and address the problems of the Negro people." Lasky concluded that "close examination of Kennedy's

declared his liking for Joseph R. McCarthy, refering to him as a patriot and to Alger Hiss, a New Dealer falsely accused of being a communist spy, as a traitor.[38] Adopting vicious red baiting tactics as a member of the House Labor committee, Kennedy praised Richard. M. Nixon while announcing his desire to "get the foreigners off our backs."[39]

On domestic issues, Kennedy was all over the spectrum, voting for some liberal measures like extending social security and minimum wage, though derided liberal "do-gooders" and voted against funds for hospital construction, rural cooperatives, flood control, public libraries in areas without any, public health grants, the Navajo and Hopi Indians, a bill prohibiting employment discrimination and funding for the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA).[40] Considered a "moderate Democrat," JFK departed from the Democratic Party leadership in 1950 to support a Rephblican proposal for a $600 million across the board cut in federal spending as he spoke out against deficit financing and wasteful government spending.[41] On civil rights, Kennedy sided twice with liberals and twice with the South, adopting the then standard view of Reconstruction as a "black nightmare the South never could forget."[42] For a time, Kennedy was known as "Dixie's favorite Yankee."[43]

First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt said that Kennedy epitomized "the new managerial elite that has neither principles nor character."[44] Journalist Victor Lasky characterized Kennedy as a political chameleon with a well-oiled public relations machine behind him whose legislative performance in his first six years in Congress was "listless and uninspired."[45] Journalist Joseph Kraft wrote that Kennedy's leadership style was extrenely cautious; he would "make decisions at the margin, commiting himself to little and leaving room for escape."[46] In foreign policy, Kennedy's fealty to ruling class interests manifested in his support for the 1947 National Security Act creating the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), for a stronger U.S. Air Force, and

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performance as a Senator shows he consistently placed personal political advantage ahead of progress in legislation designed to aid working men and women." John and Bobby earned fame for going after corrupt labor leaders, but Lasky showed that the leaders they went after were those who supported Republican causes like Jimmy Hoffa, and that they protected United Auto Workers (UAW) lunion eader Walter Reuther, a key supporter of the Democratic Party and Kennedy. According to a GOP report, Reuther and the UAW had adopted a "clear pattern of crime and violence marked by importing professional hoodlums who through mass picketing, terroristic tactics, personal threats and initidation" sought to win certain strikes.

[38] David Burner, *John F. Kennedy and a New Generation* (Boston: Little, Brown. Company, 1988), 25. On Hiss, see Joan Brady, *America's Dreyfus: The Case Nixon Rigged* (Skyscraper Publications, 2015). With Hubert Humphrey and Wayne Morse, Kennedy supported the communist control act, which David Burner says put Kennedy "safely on the side of antilibertarian red-baiting."

[39] Burner, *John F. Kennedy and a New Generation*, 23, 24; Lasky, *JFK*, 110, 111. One of Kennedy's first victims on the House Labor Committee was Harold Christoffel, a Milwaukee official of the UAW and CIO whom both Kennedy and Nixon "badgered and bullied," according to Lasky. Lasky quoted journalist Paul Healy who wrote in 1950 that "as an effective anti-Communist liberal Kennedy is more hated by Commies then if he were a reactionary."

[40] Burner, *John F. Kennedy and a New Generation,* 24.

[41] Lasky, *JFK*, 106, 119.

[42] Burner, *John F. Kennedy and a New Generation,* 31.

[43] Lasky, *JFK*, 276.

[44] Davis, *The Kennedy's*, 292.

[45] Lasky, *JFK*, 99.

[46] Joseph Kraft, *Profiles in Power: A Washington Insight* (New York: New American Library, 1966), 6.

for the Truman doctrine authorizing $400 million to Turkey and Greece to fight communism.[47] In the latter case, the aid was given to a government headed by a former Nazi spy to help coordinate a vicious counterinsurgency campaign against Greek leftists.[48] Kennedy also sponsored a July 1950 ammendment to provide fascist Spain—ruled by Francisco Franco—with $75 million in military assistance.[49]

Kennedy's support for Truman's tought line on the Soviets contrasted with his father who remained an isolationist from his pre World War II days. Joseph Kennedy believed that Communism would fall apart on its own. JFK, however, stressed Moscow's offensive designs, said that FDR had given Eastern Europe to "the reds" at Yalta, and rejected diplomatic calls by Walter Lippman and conservative critics of the Truman doctrine for diplomatic overtures to the Kremlin. According to JFK, the U.S. had not intervened in two world wars to "cede continental domination in Europe to a hostile entity." Most Americans would "staunchly oppose 'the suffering people of Europe and Asia succombing to the false, soporific ideology of red totalitarianism."[50]

Harvard University historian Frederik Logevall calls Kennedy in his 2020 book *JFK: Coming of Age in the American Century*, "an original cold warrior" who "made anticommunism his letimotif even in domestic policy."[51] Logevall notes how Kennedy castigated Roosevelt's former Vice President Henry Wallace who ran for president in 1948 on a third party ticket vowing to deescalate the Cold War, make peace with the Russians and shut down U.S. overseas military bases that encircled the Soviet Union. In a radio speech in Boston in 1947, Kennedy charcterized Wallace as "naïve" and stated that he was wrong in claiming that "the Russian experiment was a good one" as the Russian people under the communist system had "neither economic security nor personal freedom….They lacked the right to strike and were subject to arbitrary arrest and punishment, including being sent to Siberian labor camps." Kennedy added that the "Kremlin leaders had gobbled up the Baltic states, eastern Poland and the Kuerile Islands (seized from Japan before the end of the Pacific War) and were looking to expand their reach into Greece, Turkey and Iran. Washington therefore had no option but to adopt Secretary of State James Byrnes' preferred policy 'get tough with the Russians.'"[52]

According to Logevall, when Kennedy ever criticized Truman's foreign policy, it was because Kennedy said that it was insufficiently vigilant in confronting the Soviet threat. When Kennedy ran for U.S. Senate against Henry Cabot Lodge in 1952, he said that Republican

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[47] Logevall, *JFK,* 450; Burner, *John F. Kennedy and a New Generation,* 24.
[48] Kuzmarov, *Modernizing Repression*, 189-193.
[49] Lasky, *JFK*, 143.
[50] Logevall, *JFK*, 450; Burner, *John F. Kennedy and a New Generation*, 23; Lasky, *JFK*, 99. JFK claimed that Roosevelt had done terrible things because "he did not understand the Russian mind."
[51] Logevall, *JFK*, 451.
[52] Logevall, *JFK*, 431. Robert F. Kennedy echoed the views of JFK in those years about Wallace, considering his leftist challenge to Harry S. Truman in the 1948 election "outrageous." Bobby also expressed contempt for FDR, claiming that he had "made deals in the international arena beneficial to the Sviet Union." Journalist Victor Lasky wrote that "Bobby's thinking in those years reflected his brother Jack's views as a young Congressman." When Jack ran for U.S. Senate against Henry Cabot Lodge, a scion of the Republican Party establishment, Bobby ordered development of a forty page study which sought to demonstrate that Lodge was "soft on communism." The document accused Lodge of "straddling on the big issues of the guilt or innocence of Owen Lattimore, John Service and Philip Jessup," and called for a strong anticommunist policy in the Far East. Lasky, *Robert F. Kennedy*, 63, 72.

promises to end the Korean War would inevitably lead to a Communist attack on Alaska and World War III.[53] On China, Kennedy was tougher than on the Soviets. Kennedy joined with the China Lobby, a collection of journalists, businessmen and right-wing lawmakers who supported nationalist leader Chiang Kai-Shek in China's civil war against the Communists. After Chiang's forces were defeated by Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Kennedy gave a speech on the House floor stating that "responsibility for the failure of our foreign policy in the Far East rests squarely with the White House and Department of State." Kennedy stated that "so concerned were our diplomats, the Lattimores and the Fairbanks, with the imperfection of the democratic system in China after 20 years of war and the tales of corruption in high places that they lost sight of our tremendous stake in a non-Communist China. This House must now assume the responsibility of preventing the onrushing tide of communism from engulfing all of Asia."[54]

Aaron Good and other pro-Kennedy intellectuals characterize Kennedy as someone who was against colonialism—which was true in the sense that he wanted to see an end to European colonialism in Southeast Asia and Africa among other places. However, Kennedy was oblivious to the construction of an American empire after World War II and to the neocolonial character of U.S. foreign policies that he championed. As a vigorous anticommunist he warned repeatedly against inaction in the face of what he called "red totalitarianism" and believed in the U.S. Cold War mission of intervening in countries world wide. A 1960 campaign book carrying Kennedy's name, *The Strategy of Peace*, insisted that the U.S. must "regain the ability to intervene effectively and swiftly in any limited war anywhere in the world."[55] Not exactly the statement of a pacifist or anti-imperialist.

The Kennedy Counterinsurgency Crusade

In a 1992 book, *Instruments of Statecraft: U.S. Guerrilla Warfare, Counger-Insurgency, Counter-Terrorism, 1940-1970*, Michael McClintock wrote that "the Eisenhower emphasis on offensive, unconventional covert war against undesirable governments was matched by Kennedy's overt and covert war against *the internal enemies* of friendly governments. This latter task, the counterinsurgency dimension of political warfare, became a principal public plank of Kennedy's foreign policy."[56]

Kennedy had worked briefly for the Office of Naval Intelligence after World War II, and his father served in the mid 1950s on the President's Board of Consultants on Foreign Intelligence activities, which put him in close contact with CIA Director Allen Dulles.[57] A devotee of James Bond, JFK read the writings of Mao Zedong and Che Guevara, according to Arthur Schlesinger Jr., and became fascinated with the Special Forces as the kind of counter-guerrilla force to match Mao and Che's revolutionary forces.[58] According to Roger Hilsman, one

[53] Lasky, *JFK*, 155.
[54] Logevall, *JFK*, 465; Richard D. Mahoney, *JFK: Ordeal in Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 13.
[55] Burner, *John F. Kennedy and a New Generation*, 40.
[56] Michael McClintock, *Instruments of Statecraft: US Guerrilla Warfare, Counterinsurgency, Counterterrorism, 1940-1990* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992), 161.
[57] David Nasaw, *The Patriarch: The Remarkable Life and Turbulent Times of Joseph P. Kennedy* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2012), 699.
[58] McClintock, *Instruments of Statecraft,* 179.

of the first questions that Kennedy put to his associates after his inauguration was "what are we doing about guerrilla warfare."[59] At the first meeting of his National Security Council, National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 2 was drafted instructing the Defense Secretary, Robert S. McNamara to look into the matter of "increasing counter-guerrilla resources."[60]

Calling on the public to support him in resisting a "monolithic and ruthless conspiracy [communism] that relies primarily on covert means for expanding its sphere of influence,"[61] Kennedy soon became personally involved in assessing the Special Forces' training and equipment, insisting that they wear Green Berets. Since at least the 1950s, Kennedy identified with a school of thought then gaining prominence which identified low profile "brushfire wars" under Soviet sponsorship as a major new threat to the world balance of power.[62] Douglas Blaufarb, who served as CIA station chief in Laos during the Vietnam War, noted that there was little evidence that the post-Stalin Soviets were actually fomenting or encouraging communist parties to launch insurgencies.[63] In 1961, McNamara was directed to reprogram $100 million from existing defense programs to "expand and reorient existing forces for paramilitary and sub-limited or unconventional wars such as require guerrilla fighters with special skills or foreign language fluency."[64]

The Bay of Pigs became one test along with creation of the CIA's Hmong army in Laos and Vietnam, where the Green Berets operated under CIA command. Although Kennedy conceded that "the main burden of local defense against overt attack, subversion, and guerrilla warfare must rest on local populations and forces," he insisted on an American obligation to "contribute in the form of strong highly mobile forces trained in this type of warfare."[65] In a speech before a special joint session of Congress on May 25, 1961, President Kennedy requested an additional $1.9 billion: $535 for foreign aid to "perimeter countries directly threatened by overt invasion," almost half a billion to strengthen the army and Marines, and the balance for the space program.[66] Kennedy around this time doubled the Special Forces and augmented its resources, while expanding the training of foreign troops in counterinsurgency doctrine at the U.S. Army School of the Americans in the Panama Canal Zone and at other U.S. army facilities located both within the U.S. and overseas.[67]

The July 1962 Joint Chiefs project report said that 79 U.S. counterinsurgency military training teams were then operating in 19 countries "threatened by insurgent situations."[68] A month earlier, NSAM 124 established the Special Group on Counterinsurgency (CI) to "assure the use of U.S. resources with maximum effectiveness in preventing and resisting subversive

[59] Douglas Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era: U.S. Doctrine and Performance, 1950 to the Present* (New York: The Free Press, 1977), 52.
[60] Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era,* 52.
[61] Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era,* 54.
[62] McClintock, *Instruments of Statecraft,* 162.
[63] Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era*.
[64] McClintock, *Instruments of Statecraft,* 163.
[65] McClintock, *Instruments of Statecraft,* 164.
[66] McClintock, *Instruments of Statecraft,* 164.
[67] McClintock, *Instruments of Statecraft,* 180, 185.
[68] McClintock, *Instruments of Statecraft,* 187.

insurgency in friendly countries."[69] The chair of the group, General Maxwell Taylor, called the CI "a sort of Joint Chiefs of Staff for the control of all agencies involved in counterinsurgency." Primary target countries for operations were: Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Burma, Iran, Cameroon, Guatemala, Ecuador, Venezuela and Colombia.[70] The Edward Lansdale-Ramon Magsaysay Philippines campaign to subdue the left-wing Hukbalahap movement in Philippines in the 1950s was considered a model to follow—in part because of the adoption of successful civic action programs offering economic aid inducements that helped to undercut the guerrillas appeal along with effective pyshcological warfare operations and political reform combined with carefully calibrated police-intelligence operations and acts of intimidation like hanging dead guerrillas in town squares on hooks.[71]

The development dimension of the Kennedy administration's counterinsurgency doctrine was influenced by economist Walt W. Rostow, a principal adviser on counterinsurgency whose book *Stages of Economic Growth* postulated an evolutionary process by which states would achieve economic growth and political maturity. Rostow supported military rule and the crushing of communist backed guerrillas to stabilize countries so they could be better integrated into the global capitalist economy.[72] Rostow's influence exemplifies the interventionist and imperialistic spirit of the Kennedy administration.

Kennedy and Vietnam; "Beginning Our Active Participation in the War…"

Kennedy's support for the Vietnam War went back to a 1951 visit to Vietnam when he criticized French policy but advocated for the building of strong native noncommunist sentiment and "to rely on that as a spearhead of defense [against communist aggression] rather than upon the legions of General de Lattre."[73] In April 1954, Kennedy gave a speech after the Geneva conference warning against any negotiated solution that would allow participation in the Vietnamese government by Ho Chi Minh.[74] Kennedy supported the construction of a U.S. client state in South Vietnam under the leadership of Catholic anticommunist Ngo Dinh Diem to counter Ho in violation of the 1954 Geneva convention that called for reunification of Vietnam. When elections were scheduled in 1956 in South Vietnam—which Kennedy called "our offspring"—they were canceled because it was recognized that Ho would win.[75]

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[69] McClintock, *Instruments of Statecraft,* 165.
[70] McClintock, *Instruments of Statecraft,* 165. CIA Director John McCone was part of the Special Group along with Robert F. Kennedy who was a prime mover in the group.
[71] McClintock, *Instruments of Statecraft,* 165; Jonathan Nashel, *Edward Lansdale's Cold War* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005); Jeremy Kuzmarov, "Under the Façade of Benevolence: Psy-Wars, Amnesty and Defectors in America's Asian Wars," *The International History Review*, 2019.
[72] McClintock, *Instruments of Statecraft,* 165. See also Michael Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and 'Nation Building' in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).
[73] Arthur Schlesinger Jr. *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 320.
[74] Robert Scheer, *A Vietnam Primer*, published by the editors of *Ramparts Magazine*, 1965, 26. In 1951, when Kennedy visited Vietnam, he criticized French policy but advocated for the building of strong native noncommunist sentiment and "to rely on that as a spearhead of defense [against communist aggression] rather than upon the legions of General de Lattre." Schlesinger Jr. *A Thousand Days,* 320.
[75] Michael Schaller, *The United States and China: Into the 21st Century*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 138; Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy*, 254.

Kennedy was one of the founders of the CIA-funded American Friends of Vietnam (the AFV), a lobby group advocating for a massive aid program to Diem that "had a lot to do with getting the U.S. into the Vietnam War," according to historian Joseph Morgan.[76] Kennedy was allegedly introduced to Diem in 1953 through his father at a luncheon for Senators interested in the Far East hosted by Justice William O. Douglas.[77] In 1956, JFK was the principal speaker at the AFV's symposium, where he called for greater military support to help "put out the communist arson" as had been done in Korea. Kennedy called South Vietnam a "brave little state" and "the cornerstone of the free world in Southeast Asia, the keystone of the arch, the finger in the dike, Burma, Thailand, India, Japan, the Philippines, and obviously Laos and Cambodia….would be threatened if the red tide of communism overflowed in Vietnam."[78]

According to Joseph Morgan, one of the AFV's key functions was to produce a "tremendous amount of pro-Diem propaganda in U.S. newspapers and magazines" ensuring that "the drawbacks of the Diem regime received little scrutiny from the American press."[79] These drawbacks included Diem's alienation of the majority Buddhist population and use of a secret policing apparatus financed by the CIA to terrorize villagers and repress the political opposition, including members of the Vietminh who had moved back to their homes after spearheading defeat of the French at the 1954 Battle of Dienbienphu.[80]

Buddhist bonzes in An Giang province described how Diemist forces imposing forced relocation edicts would enter their villages and demolished homes, killed the buffalo and pigs and beat up, imprisoned and tortured anyone who did not comply. One bonze said that the so-called Vietcong "existed because of the crimes of the Diemists" and were "our own people" who were "forced to take to the jungle to defend themselves…when they came to our villages at night for food, they would pay, unlike the Diemists who loot and kill."[81]

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[76] Joseph G. Morgan, *The Vietnam Lobby: The American Friends of Vietnam, 1955-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), x. According to Morgan, the AFV "created an ideological framework justifying America's intervention in Vietnam and the Saigon government's harsh treatment of political opponents as a necessary reaction to the communist menace." See also David W. Conde, *CIA—Core of the Cancer* (New Delhi: Entente Private Limited, 1970); Robert Scheer, "How the United States Got Involved in Vietnam," A Report to the Study of Democratic Institutions, Santa Barbara, California, The Fund for the Republic Inc., 1965, 32. CIA officer Richard Bissel said that the CIA was "deeply involved in winning support for Diem."

[77] Schlesinger Jr. *A Thousand Days,* 321.

[78] Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy*, 255; Senator John F. Kennedy, *The Strategy of Peace*, ed. Allan Nevins (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), 61, 62. Allan Nevins, a historian at Columbia University wrote embarassingly in Kennedy's campaign book that when "in the summer of 1954 Vietnam was partitioned between Communist North and Nationalist south and most people feared the aggressive Red forces would soon sweep over the whole country, Senator Kennedy had the wisdom to support military aid and other assistance programs that helped transform 'the little republic'" into a "proving ground for democracy" that has "produced in its President Ngo Dinh Diem one of the true statesmen of the new Asia. Peace and order have been restored, food is abundant, the economic life is troubled only by inflation and education is improving. With current economic aid of about $1.85 million, Vietnam is a country of which the West may feel proud, and which it should continue to protect."

[79] Seth Jacobs, *Cold War Mandarin: Ngo Dinh Diem and the Origins of America's War in Vietnam, 1950-1963* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 101, 102.

[80] Jacobs, *Cold War Mandarin*. The cruelty of the Diemist regime and security apparatus created by the U.S. is detailed in Wilfred G. Burchett's book, *The Furtive War: The United States in Vietnam and Laos* (New York: International Publishers, 1963).

[81] Burchett, *The Furtive War*, 7, 8.

Kennedy's attraction to Diem stemmed from his fervent anticommunism and Catholicism. Arthur Schlesinger Jr., felt that the U.S. should encourage nationalist anticommunists like Diem through "judicious interventions in Asian affairs that would counter the appeal of the Russian revolutionary spirit in underdeveloped areas."[82] These comments contradict authors who consider Kennedy to be an anti-imperialist as Schlesinger's logic—which guided the Kennedy administration's thinking—presupposed an American right to suppress political movements inspired by the Russian revolution.[83]

In a presidential tape recording shortly before Diem was overthrown and assassinated in November 1963 (three weeks before JFK was himself killed), Kennedy recounted meeting Diem in the early 1950s with Chief Justice Douglas and states that Diem was "an extraordinary character" who "while becoming increasingly difficult in the last months, nevertheless, over a ten year period" had "kept his country together and maintained its independence under very adverse conditions."[84] This is a distortion of history as Diem had prevented Vietnam's reunification, desired by majority of Vietnamese, ensured that South Vietnam evolved as a dependancy of the U.S., and ruled through terror.

According to journalist Victor Lasky, the crucial decision to escalate from military advisers to combat troops in Vietnam was President Kennedy's. An October 1961 administration White Paper specified the necessity of the U.S. coming to the defense of the beleagured South Vietnamese republic, which North Vietnam was supposedly threatening to conquer, although it was acknowledged that the bulk of the Vietcong guerrillas (or National Liberation Front) were South Vietnamese peasants living in their native villages.[85] Hanoi could not be the aggressor in its own country further as a) most Vietnamese wanted the reunification of their country since there was no historical basis for its division; b) southern leaders could only survive with massive infusions of American military and economic aid; and c) it was admitted by Dwight Eisenhower that if elections in South Vietnam had been allowed in 1956, North Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh would have won with 80 percent of the vote.[86]

Under Kennedy's direction, the number of American troops in Vietnam was increased from 750 in early 1961 to at least 16,000. The size of the South Vietnamese army was increased from 150,000 to 250,000 in violation of the Geneva Accords (whicih set a a limit at 150,000).[87] Military supplies to Diem's government were further increased from $125 million in 1961 to $400 million in 1962. Over $1 billion in aid was provided as President Kennedy assigned diplomatic and military personnel to Saigon who were fully committed to support the Diem regime—which UN Secretary General U Thant chastised as among the most corrupt in the

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[82] Morgan, *The Vietnam Lobby,* 13.

[83] Schlesinger's fundamental conservatism comes out in his hostility to left-wing intellectuals whom he calls "utopians" in his book *A Thousand Days*. The Russian revolution was a model for Third World countries because it helped Russia to escape domination by the Anglo-American banking elite and established a framework for social justice.

[84] See https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/educational-resources/jfk-memoir-dictation-assassination-of-diem.

[85] Scheer, "How the United States Got Involved in Vietnam," 62, 63.

[86] For refutation of the spurious logic adopted by the Kennedy administration ajd its successors, see H. Bruce Franklin, *Vietnam and Other American Fantasies* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000).

[87] Scheer, "How the United States Got Involved in Vietnam," 60.

world.[88] In 1962 while in Saigon, Bobby Kennedy described President Ngo as a "brave" and "patriotic" leader of his people. "We are going to win in Vietnam," said Bobby. "We will remain here until we do win…I think the American people understand and fully support this struggle."[89]

The Kennedy's had envisioned Vietnam as a laboratory for fighting unconventional or counter-guerrilla wars, which they were enthralled with. The Vietnamese in turn functioned as human guinea pigs. The Kennedy administration increased counter-insurgency weapons research by over $100 million and authorized an increase of Special Forces to Vietnam in November 1961, providing helicopters, light aviation and transport equipment," and personnel "for aerial reconnaissance, instruction in and execution of air-ground support and special intelligence." Chemical defoliation campaigns to ravage the NLF food crop modeled after British action in Malaya and napalm strikes began soon after.[90]

With America still in the throes of an era of "better living through chemistry," DARPA scientists at the army's biological warfare laboratory at Ft. Detrick Maryland had developed Agent Orange in conjunction with Monsanto to starve the "Vietcong" by poisoning a jungle root called manioc, their primary food crop and deprive them of jungle cover, the aim being to turn them into a "hungry band of outlaws" as Roger Hilsman, who headed the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, put it.[91] Hospitals throughout South Vietnam soon reported an increase in still births and upsurge in babies born with spina bifida and other deformities. By February 1962, the U.S. Air Force had flown hundreds of bombing missions, often with only a low-ranking Vietnamese enlisted man for show. "Operation Farm Gate" created a South Vietnamese air force, which flew missions that involved spraying chemical defoliants [Agent Orange] and dropping napalm bombs that "put thefear of God into the 'Vietcong,'" according to General Paul Harkins, a top aide to George Patton in World War II.[92] Hilsman, a veteran of guerrilla warfare operations in Burma during World War II, wrote: "the helicopters were grand..roaring in over the treetops, they were a terrifying sight to superstitious Vietcong peasants," who simply turned and ran, becoming easy targets.[93]

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[88] Morgan, *The Vietnam Lobby,* 77; Schaller, *The United States and China*, 139; Burchett, *The Furtive War*, 46; Hersh, *The Dark Side of Camelot*, 420. Burchett wrote that "no peasants anywhere in the world had so many dollars per capita lavished in ther extermination."

[89] Lasky, *Robert F. Kennedy*, 13.

[90] Selverstone, *The Kennedy Withdrawal*, 33. Saigon became home to a Combat Development and Test center that would develop new weapons and tactics, including novel uses for boats, planes, chemicals and dogs, as well as new rifles, grenades and bullets. Established by the Pentagon's Project Agile, the center aimed to localize these conficts as much as possible, allowing for indigenous forces to fight wars. Kennedy himself had shifted resources to meet these ends, requesting greater sums for military assistance and an "expansion of funds for nonnuclar war, paramilitary operations and sub-limted or unconventional war."

[91] Douglas Martin, "Roger Hilsman, Adviser to Kennedy on Vietnam, Dies at 94," *The New York Times*, March 10, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/11/us/politics/roger-hilsman-adviser-to-kennedy-on-vietnam-dies-at-94.html.

[92] Noam Chomsky, *Rethinking Camelot: JFK, the Vietnam War, and US Political Culture* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992), 50, 51. Kennedy also significantly increased covert operations into North Vietnam.

[93] Chomsky, *Rethinking Camelot,* 51. Historian Marc Selverstone points out that members of the Kennedy administration like Chester Bowles, a former Rockefeller foundation trustee no less, and John Kenneth Galbraith who were against sending troops to Vietnam, were less well positioned to shape policy than those who supported troop deployments. Noam Chomsky emphasized accurately that Kennedy preferred counterinsurgency to World War II style operations; strategic hamlets, concentration camps and extermination of the political opposition over indiscriminate bombing.

When Ngo Dinh Diem sparked buddhist immolations and began making peace overtures to the North Vietnamese, the Kennedy administration sanctioned a coup that led to the murder of him and his brother.[94] The aim of the coup was to replace Diem with more reliable client rulers who could prosecute the war against the "Vietcong" more effectively.[95] The coup deepened American involvement in Vietnamese affairs as it committed the United States to ensuring the survival of the government's that succeeded Diem's.

Somehow thanks to the rewriting of history by the court historians, people have been led to believe that if President Kennedy were alive, there would have been no war in Vietnam. But as onetime Kennedy family friend Gore Vidal observed: "the mythmakers have obscured the fact that it was JFK who began our active participation in the war when in 1961, he [began] the first of a gradual buildup of American troops….And there is no evidence that he would not have persisted in that war for, as he said to a friend shortly before he died: 'I have to go all the way with this one.' He could not afford a second Cuba and hope to maintain the appearance of a defender of the Free World at the ballot box in 1964."[96]

On September 26, less then two months before his assassination, Kennedy said that "we keep troops in Vietnam and elsewhere because our freedom is tied up with theirs and the security of the US is thereby endangered if they pass behind the Iron Curtain. So all those who suggest we withdraw [in any way], I could not disagree with them more.. If the United States were to falter, the whole world, in my opinion, would inevitably begin to move towards the communist bloc."[97] In November, after the Diem regime was overthrown, Kennedy told the press that he hoped an increased effort in the war, adding that our policy "now should be to intensify the struggle so that we can bring Americans out of there"—after victory. In Fort Worth, a few hours before the assassination, Kennedy made his last statement about Vietnam, stating: "without the United States, South Vietnam would collapse overnight."[98]

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[94] Hersh, *The Dark Side of Camelot*, ch. 23.
[95] Morgam, *The Vietnam Lobby*, 102.
[96] Lasky, *Robert F. Kennedy,* 14.
[97] Chomsky, *Rethinking Camelot,* 47.
[98] Chomsky, *Rethinking Camelot,* 47. James Douglass claims in *JFK and the Unspeakable* (p. 124, 125) that Kennedy lied to the public about his true intentions to withdraw from Vietnam and growing misgivings about the war, which he had developed after reading a report by Mike Mansfield, a former AFV colleague who had visited Vietnam and developed second thoughts. According to Douglass, Kennedy lied primarily because he wanted to win the 1964 elections. His plan was to win the election and then initiate plans for withdrawal by 1965. According to aide Kenny O'Donnell, Kennedy told Mansfield about this privately in spring 1963. Somehow Douglass thinks that it was honorable of Kennedy to lie to the public to secure election and to sacrifice American boys and countless Vietnamese in a cause he did not believe in. By continuing to support the war, Kennedy was actually digging a deeper hole that would have been impossible for him to get out of even if he wanted to withdraw from Vietnam because he had conditioned the public to think the war was a noble cause and he would be seen to have compromised his legitimacy by backtracking on his own earlier claims. Lyndon Johnson also had private misgivings about the Vietnam War as did many leading political figures in the mid 1960s but Johnson still escalated the war based on political contingency. If Kennedy indeed had developed misgivings about Vietnam—on tactical grounds—it shows a lack of political courage because his political rhetoric did not match his private convictions—as is true of many conventional poliiticians. His cynicism was apparent in that he would keep troops in Vietnam and let more Americans and Vietnamese die so he could win an election and then he would consider withdrawal if things continued to deteriorate. See discussion in Chomsky, *Rethinking Camelot*, 437, 438.

In the speech he was to give in Dallas, he intended to say that "our successful defense of freedom in Cuba, Laos, the Congo, and Berlin" can be attributed "not to the words we used, but to the strength we stood ready to use. Kennedy extolled the huge military buildup, undertaken to blunt ambitions of internaitonal communism. As the watchman on the walls of world freedom, the U.S. had to undertake tasks that were painful, risky and costly, as is true in Southeast Asia. But we are not weary of the task."[99]

Some historians claim to have unearthed internal planning documents suggesting that Kennedy was intent on withdrawing.[100] However, these documents, drafted by Robert S. McNamara, were contingent on the U.S. achieving its strategic/imperialist goals in Vietnam, which meant defeating the Vietcong and establishing a stable client government in the South that would enable local troops to carry the rest of the fighting burden and establish a U.S. military outpost in South Vietnam to help counter communist China. A national security memorandum issued by Lyndon B. Johnson authorizing a troop escalation that is cited as evidence of a major shift in policy had actually been drafted by Kennedy's National Security advisor McGeorge Bundy on November 20, before Kennedy's assassination for a meeting about the conflict in Honolulu. According to Noam Chomsky, the version adopted by Lyndon B. Johnson was actually weaker than the one proposed when Kennedy was still president.[101]

In a 2022 study published by Harvard University Press, Marc Selverstone debunks the myth that Kennedy was intent on withdrawing troops from Vietnam, showing that Kennedy was very competitive with a macho streak and did not want to lose. Kennedy's plan for victory in Vietnam, developed by hawkish advisers like Robert S. McNamara, Maxwell Taylor and McGeorge Bundy, was to expand covert military operations into the North and bombing, while sustaining a U.S. advisory role in the South.[102] Highly revealing is the fact that Kennedy hagiographer Arthur Schlesinger Jr. did not say a word about Kennedy having any intent of withdrawing from Vietnam in his chronicle of the Kennedy White House, *One Thousand Days*, which was written in 1965, *before* the Vietnam War became unpopular.[103] Historian James N. Giglio quotes Dean Rusk who said that "at no time did Kennedy ever say or hint or suggest to me that he was planning to withdraw from Vietnam in 1965."[104] In an oral history that he gave

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[99] Chomsky, *Rethinking Camelot,* 47.

[100] See John M. Newman, *JFK and Vietnam: Deception, Intrigue and the Struggle For Power* (CreateSPace Independent Publishing, 2017); Douglass, *JFK and the Unspeakable*.

[101] Chomsky, *Rethinking Camelot,* 83.

[102] Marc Selverstone, *The Kennedy Withdrawa: Camelot and the American Commitment to Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022), 33. Selverstone's argument is basically supported by authors like L. Fletcher Prouty who believe that Kennedy's Vietnam withdrawal plan was the basis for his assassination. See L. Fletcher Prouty, *JFK: The CIA, Vietnam and the Plot to Assassinate John F. Kennedy*, foreword by Jesse Ventura, introduction by Oliver Stone (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2011). Prouty emphasizes that Kennedy was intent on withdrawing U.S. troops by 1965 but Vietnamizing the war; a strategy adopted by Richard M. Nixon. Kennedy was not willing to abandon America's South Vietnam's ally, which he had invested greatly in. It is unclear what he would have done if and when this ally was about to fall, which it would have without American support.

[103] Schlesinger Jr. *A Thousand Days.*

[104] Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy*, 269. James N. Giglio suggests that Kennedy preceded Nixon in favoring Vietnamization of the war, which is not the same as withdrawal**.** He wrote that "given what we know of President Kennedy, it is difficult to conceive of his pulling out of Vietnam without an acceptable resolution, perhaps neutralization. At the same time, it is equally hard to imagine Kennedy carrying escalation to the extremes that Johnson did," which sounds about right. Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy*, 269. Giglio writes that

with the Kennedy library in 1964, Bobby Kennedy said that his brother was convinced that the U.S. had to stay in Vietnam and win the war. Only later, around 1967, after the war became unpopular and Kennedy was running for president as a peace candidate, did RFK say that his brother was planning to withdraw.[105]

JFK's influence on America's failed crusade in Vietnam was summed up in a passage by Michael Herr in his 1977 book *Dispatches* in which he wrote about Vietnam having been a "spook war" run by "irregulars working in remote places under little direct authority, acting out their fantasies with more freedom than most men ever knew." But by 1967, "all you saw were the impaired spook reflex, prim adventurers living too long on the blodless fringes of the action, heartbroken and memory ruptured, working alone together toward a classified universe. They seemed like the saddest casualties of the Sixties, *all the promise of good service on the New Frontier either gone or surviving like the vaguest salvages of a dream, still in love with their dead leader, blown away in his prime and theirs*." Though the ideals behind the war were now discredited, Herr noted that the "jargon was still streaming out: Frontier, census grievance, black operation, revolutionary development, armed propaganda." When he asked a spook what that one of the slogans meant, "the spook just smiled."[106] These comments are highly revealing of the hollwness of American counterinsurgency doctrine conceived of by the New Frontiersmen and "best and the brightest" under Kennedy whose vision shaped and guided the disastrous American policy in Vietnam during its formative phase.

Fighting A Secret War in Laos

In Laos, Kennedy is given credit for standing up to the Joint Chiefs demand for a military intervention, though Kennedy chose to send U.S. troops into neghboring Thailand, whose corrupt, right wing government functioned as a reliable U.S. proxy. According to Theodore Sorenson, only the Bay of Pigs disaster set Kennedy's mind firmly against direct U.S. military intervention in Laos as he could not afford the chance of a Laotian disaster following so swiftly after the Cuban one.[107] This was especially so because the Royal Lao Army (RLA) was

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Kennedy was "too cautious, prudent and distrusting of the military to succomb to that extent [as Johnson did in sending 500,000 U.S. ground forces by 1968].

[105] Hersh, *The Dark Side of Camelot*, 436. When asked what Kennedy would do if the Vietnamese were about to lose the war, Bobby said in the 1964 Oral history interview that "we'd face that when we came to it." But in 1967, he told Daniel Ellsberg allegedly that his brother was absolutely determined not to send ground units [which he already had] and that in the face of defeat would have "fuzzed it up…would have gotten a government in that asked us out or negotiated with the other side." However, when Diem started to do the latter in October-November 1963, the Kennedy's backed a coup against him. RFK also said "we would have handled it like Laos," where JFK coordinated expansion of a major covert military operation to unseat the Pathet Lao (see below). Kuznick and Stone, *An Untold History of the United States*, 316. Kuznick and Stone refer to RFK's 1967 interview with Ellsberg as proof that JFK was poised to withdraw from Vietnam without noting the discrepancy with RFK's earlier statements in 1964, which is problematic. After his brother's death, Bobby continued to feel strongly about the necessity of saving South Vietnam from the communists, appealing to President Johnson to send him to Saigon as ambassador. Johnson later observed with astonishment Bobby's transformation from hawk to dove, which occurred only later in the 1960s as he tried to ride the wave of the youth counter-cultural vote into office. Lasky, *Robert F. Kennedy*.

[106] Michael Herr, *Dispatches* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 51, 52.

[107] Miroff, *Pragmatic Illusions,* 49; Michael V. Forrestal, Memo for the President, "Laos Planning," June 18, 1963, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, MA, White House files, https://www.jfklibrary.org/sites/default/files/styles/orange_dam/https/static.jfklibrary.org/ht47qif40g11352a0di7pojn7knn501v.jpg?itok=P3iXXWlK; W.W. Rostow, Memorandum to the President, March 21, 1961, John F. Kennedy

incapable of mounting an effective fight. Sorenson asked Kennedy: "do we want an indefinite occupation of an unenthusiastic, dark skinned population…unwilling to fight for their own freedom?"[108]

Kennedy's answer was of course yes. Nevertheless, he increased military aid to Laos—even when calling RLA commander Phoumi Nosavan a "total shit"—transforming the corps of American military advisers in Laos, who up to that point had wandered about in civilian clothes, into a Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG) that were authorized to put on uniforms and accompany Laotian troops into combat.[109] The CIA were meanwhile supplied with U.S. aircraft and "sheep-dipped" crews, or U.S.military men still disguised as civilians.[110]

During the 1960 election campaign, Kennedy had criticized the Eisenhower administration for "allowing Laos to slip behind the Iron Curtain."[111] This even though Eisenhower had supported a military coup that thrust the left-wing Pathet Lao, who had led the liberation war against France in alliance with Vietminh, underground. Believing that "we've got so much to lose if this thing [Laos] goes sour [to the communists],"[112] the Kennedy adminstration ran the RLA training program out of Thailand which had ben transformed into a CIA playground. The RLA were supplied with U.S. weapons, T-28s, Thai advisers and auxiliary units and the Kennedy administration established a Royal Lao military intelligence school. A memo from the Chairman of the U.S. Army Joint Chiefs of Staff, Lyman Lemnitzer, to Kennedy in July 1961 emphasized that Lao army officers trained at the U.S. Army intelligence school on Okinawa were placed in key army command and intelligence positions, indicating U.S. control over promotion and staffing in the RLA.[113]

The Kennedy administration justified its escalation of the "secret war" in Laos by claiming that the Pathet Laos's success resulted from their being directed from outside [ie. Moscow and Hanoi]. In fact, the Pathet Lao enjoyed popular support as authentic nationalists

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Presidential Library, Laos records, https://www.jfklibrary.org/sites/default/files/styles/orange_dam/https/static.jfklibrary.org/b8166k5lxmg637gf338i4d43f86p74rs.jpg?itok=kzuFXd_t. There was uniform consensus against military intervention in Laos among Kennedy's advisers because it could trigger World War III. On May 14, 1962, Kennedy sent 6,000 U.S. ground and Air Forces to Thailand.

[108] Seth Jacobs, *The Universe Unravelling: American Foreign policy in Cold War Laos* (Ithaca; Cornell University Press, 2012), 7. Jacobs sees Sorenson's remarks as a reflection of the cultural prejudice dictating U.S. policy in this era. Jacobs also notes that during the 1960 presidential campaign, Kennedy had sounded much like John Foster Dulles, proclaiming that he "could not allow Laos and South Vietnam to fall to the communists."

[109] Jacobs, *The Universe Unravelling,* 7, 245, 249.

[110] William J. Rust, *So Much to Lose: John F. Kennedy and American policy in Laos* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 18.

[111] Rust, *So Much to Lose,* 13.

[112] Rust, *So Much to Lose,* 9.

[113] Lyman Lemnitzer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Memo for The President, "Capabilities of the Lao Army," July 7, 1961, John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, MA, Laos records, https://www.jfklibrary.org/sites/default/files/styles/orange_dam/https/static.jfklibrary.org/7mt740km1sn21466rerr2r82l264ty6x.jpg?itok=UDPbRLn; Robert W. Komer, Memo to the President, July 29, 1963, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, MA, Laos records, https://www.jfklibrary.org/sites/default/files/styles/orange_dam/https/static.jfklibrary.org/7611anvfmox8svdu46t464h7q658q80i.jpg?itok=cZaIfVH6; Rust, *So Much to Lose,* 3.

who promoted land reform, literacy programs and free health care.[114] Recognizing General Phoumi and the RLA's weakness, the Kennedy administration came to support formation of a coalition government, which was codified under the terms of the 1962 Geneva convenion that called for the removal of all foreign troops from Laos.[115]

Australian journaliast Wilfred Burchett described how the Kennedy administration sabotaged the Geneva agreement by having U.S. Special Forces "white star teams" fly out to Thailand and then fly back to Vientiane as U.S. embassy and USAID personnel.[116] Military aid to Thailand, where the secret war in Laos was coordinated, was doubled after the agreements were signed, and U.S planes were spotted still parachuting arms and supplies to commando groups fighting against the Pathet Lao.[117] The coalition government that came together was headed by neutralist Souvanna Phouma, who had association with the CIA—CIA officer R. Campbell James had developed a relationship with him in the 1950s.[118] Though the new government included Pathet Lao leader Prince Souphanouvong, Kennedy's main priority was to encouraged Souvanna Phouma's alliance with Phoumi and the right-wing Generals.[119] Averill Harriman, who headed the U.S. delegation at Geneva, stated "We must be sure the break comes between the Communists and the neutralists, rather than having the two of them teamed up as they were before."[120]

Despite the façade of Pathet Lao involvement, Wilfred Burchett reported that all the coalition government ministries and departments continued to be staffed by Phoumi loyalists.

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[114] Memo For the President, June 4, 1962, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, MA, https://www.jfklibrary.org/sites/default/files/styles/orange_dam/https/static.jfklibrary.org/654chbi5060w877v3u8jxyl1xx67188l.jpg?itok=w9MP2SQd; Summary of Kennedy's May 1961 speech in Jacobs, *The Universe Unraveling*, 246. Even the State Department concisdered Pathet Lao leader Prince Souphanouvong as an "outstandingly able and energetic leader."

[115] Three agreements were signed establishing a coalition government. The first, at Zurich (June 22, 1961) was an agreement between the three princes—Souvanna Phouma, Souphanouvong, and Boun Oum—to form a provisional government of national union. At another meeting between the three princes (Hin Heup, October 6-8, 1961), it was agreed that Prince Souvanna Phouma would be prime minister of a coalition government consisting of eight neutral members, four supporters of Souphanouvong and four of Boun Oum. The third agreement, signed at Geneva (January 19, 1962), allotted specific cabinet posts, but it was repudiated by Nosavan, the real power behind Boun Oum, within 48 hours. Wilfred Burchett calls these agreements a "time-wasting device to enable Phoumi Nosavan to prepare new offensives." Burchett, *The Furtive War*, 145.

[116] Wilfred G. Burchett, *The Second Indochina War: Cambodia and Laos* (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 152.

[117] Burchett, *The Furtive War*, 145, 148. The U.S. further violated the terms of the 1962 Geneva agreements by sponsoring South Vietnamese espionage and commando missions into Pathet Lao controlled territory in Savannakhet carried out by French army veterans trained by American instructors at Nha Trang. "Comment Les Imperialistes Americains Ont Perpétré L'Aggression et Sabote la Paix et La Neutralité du Laos au Lendemain de la Signature des Accords de Genève de 1962 Sur le Laos," Neo Lao Haksat, Committée Centrale, Janvier, 1965, British National Archives, Kew Gardens, London, FO 371 1802 71.

[118] Rust, *So Much to Lose,* 136. A wealthy Yale graduate who spoke with a posh English accent and carried a cane filled with brandy, James mixed well with the older Lao elites, according to Rust.

[119] Kuzmarov, *Modernizing Repression*, 132.
Regarding the Geneva agreements, Souphanouvong said "we see no neutral attitude from them, only aggression."

[120] Quoted in Burchett, *The Second Indochina War,* 152. Historian William J. Rust wrote that "what Kennedy wanted carried out in Laos…was the establishment of a Souvanna-led coalition goverfnment with sufficient right-wing political and military strength to resist a communist takeover and preserve Laotian neutrality." Rust, *So Much to Lose*, 86.

Demands by Prince Souphanouvong and the neutralists that the security and policing of the capital Vientiane should be on a tripartite basis went ignored. Economic plans developed by Souphanouvong and approved by the National Assembly were further blocked by General Phoumi as Finance Minister and by other government officials on the CIA payroll and under Phoumi's thumb. Burchett wrote that Souvanna Phouma's class interest prevented him from taking a stand on al this. When Souvanna met with President Kennedy in Washington a month after the Geneva accords were signed, he agreed to Kennedy's demand that at all costs no U.S. military or economic aid should pass to the Pathet Lao. A tacit agreement was reached that Souvanna would do everything possible to eventually eliminate Pathet Lao influence.[121]

The Kennedy administration's design, according to Burchett, was to wean the neutralists away from the Pathet Lao as a prelude to a renewed attempt to destroy first the latter and then the neutraliasts themselves. A step in fulfilling this design occurred with the April, 1963 assassination of Foreign Minister Quinim Pholsena, who was intent on solidifying the strength of the coalition between the neutralists and Pathet Lao. Pholsena was seen as a stumbling block to the U.S. determination to win the neutrals away from the Pathet Lao. The killing was arranged by General Siho Lamphouthacoul, who had been trained under USAID police training programs, and headed an assassination progra under General Phoumi designed to eliminate the higher cadres of the Pathet Lao and progressive neutralists, according to Burchett.[122]

To offset the RLA's poor morale and fighting capability in the fight against the Pathet, the CI championed training of "tribal groups with an exploitable paramilitary capability," supporting the creation of police paramilitary auto-defense units in Laos drawn from the opium-growing Hmong minority who had split between the Ly and Lo factions. Following a classic colonial strategy, the auto-defense units provided the genesis of the CIA's clandestine Hmong army who were seen as more effective in fighting the Pathet Lao compared to the regular Lao army and could be negotiated with independently as a tribal entity, allowing the U.S. to ignore the provisions of the 1962 Geneva accords that called for the removal of foreign troops from Laos.[123] Between 1961 and 1962, the number of organized Hmong guerrillas grew from 1,000 to 19,500.[124] Averill Hariman, the State Department's point man for Laos, backed the CIA's organization of the Hmong tribesman to "fight in the way they fought best: as guerrillas behind the North Vietnamese lines"—that would carry out covert activities against North Vietnam and disrupt North Vietnamese supplies along the north-south Ho Chi Minh Trail.[125]

A July 1963 memo to President Kennedy by National Security adviser Robert W. Komer, states explicitly that Kennedy had authorized military assistance to irregular (Meo—euphemism for Hmong) forces trained by the CIA, operating under the cover of USAID or the OPS, and that

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[121] Burchett, *The Second Indochina War,* 152-155.
[122] Burchett, *The Second Indochina War,* 156; Kuzmarov, *Modernizing Repression*, ch. 6. Burchett wrote that the murder of Pholsena, the head of the "peace and neutrality policy" comprising progressive forces among the neutralists, was the signal for an armed coup, the first stage of which was to be the seizure of the strategic Plain of Jars. The U.S. Fleet at the time moved into the Gulf of Siam.
[123] Kuzmarov, *Modernizing Repression*, 132, 133.
[124] Rust, *So Much to Lose*, 138.
[125] Parmet, *JFK*, 154. The arming of the Hmong irregulars and other tribal minorities to carry out covert operations into North Vietnam and disrupt supplies on the Ho Chi Minh trail was a key facet of the Kennedy administration's Vietnam strategy.

efforts had been taken to "strengthen" these "irregular" and "tribal" forces.[126] An August 14, 1963 memo to President Kennedy from National Security Council adviser Michael Forrestal stated that "8-9 million" had been budgeted for the Meo operation, which it said was "taken over by AID."[127] AID Director John Hanna said on a radio news program in 1970 that AID served as a cover for training and arming the Hmong secret army.[128] Kennedy advisers like Roger "Tex" Hilsman, who had drafted a cable giving support to the coup against Diem, had experience training tribal groups in Burma during World War II and, according to an official CIA history, "entertained fantasies from their OSS days of rousing the tribal population to overthrow a communist regime. They wanted to defeat the guerrillas at their own game."[129]

To help achieve the latter goals, Kennedy staffers sent several telegrams approving T-28 planes and bombs for "limited use" as reprisal against "isolated PL [Pathet Lao] provocation" in October 1963.[130] A couple of weeks later, Ambassador Leonard S. Unger approved "at his discretion [the] release [of] fuses for 100 lb bombs for use" in defense against Pathet Lao attacks and artillery.[131] The U.S. military requested more firepower "for possible future use as required"

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[126] Robert W. Komer, Memo to the President, July 29, 1963, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, MA, Laos records, https://www.jfklibrary.org/sites/default/files/styles/orange_dam/https/static.jfklibrary.org/7611anvfmox8svdu46t464h7q658q80i.jpg?itok=cZaIfVH6. Gary J. Rust reports that in 1961, Kennedy authorized an expansion of the CIA's Hmong army from 3,000-4,000 guerrillas. Rust, *So Much to Lose*, 17, 18. Thomas C. Reeves in *A Question of Character* wrote that "Jack approved a secret CIA counter-insurgency program in Laos that involved the recruitment of 36,000 opium-growing Meo and other tribal warriors and thousands of 'volunteers' paid by the agency. Air America, the CIA-owned airline became active in bombing operations as well as transportation. The agency also organized guerrilla raids into North Vietnam and China….The vast program operated by the CIA promoting mayhem and death in a surreptitious war, was illegal, immoral, dangerous, and a far cry from the idealism so often expressed in the president's formal speeches….This policy expressed the Kennedy willingness to use power illegally, and showed Jack's macho aggressiveness, his eagerness for deception and risk, and his moral indifference." (p. 284).

[127] Michael V. Forrestal, Memorandum for the President, August 14, 1963, John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, MA, Laos records, https://www.jfklibrary.org/sites/default/files/styles/orange_dam/https/static.jfklibrary.org/w54nip48y4d1tx6q361787yo65ce7858.jpg?itok=nfof-VlH. This memo also details institution of an IMF stabilization program at the behest of the Kennedy administration.

[128] Walton, *Cold War and Counter-Revolution*, 31. The Hmong were supplied through the CIA's Air America airlines, which became known as "Air Opium" (opium was the Hmong's main cash crop). The CIA, with Kennedy and Johnson administration authorization, also trained Lao Theung guerrillas on or around the Bolovens Plateau, a staging ground for infiltrators from North Vietnam to South Vietnam. The "Bolovens initiative" was designed to "pacify the area and interdict the movement of foreign troops along the Ho Chi Minh trail." The Lao Theung were also recruited as stay-behind agent in South Vietnam. Historian William J. Rust highlights a State Department paper that was discussed at a meeting of the CI pointing to violations of the Geneva convention by the Kennedy administration due to extensive covert operations that included high and low level photo-reconaissance missions, electronic intelligence (ELINT) overflights to gather information on enemy radars, and ammunition airdrops to the Hmong guerrillas from Thailand. Also mentioned in the report were two CIA case officers at Hmong headquarters and sixty-five Thai PARU forces scattered among the Hmong guerrilla units. Rust, *So Much to Lose*, 138, 206.

[129] Kuzmarov, *Modernizing Repression*, 135. A graduate of West Point's class of 1943, Hilsman had served with Merrill's Marauders, a famous unit in Burma, as well as with the OSS in Burma and China. He later received a Ph.D. in international politics at Yale University.

[130] Telegram from U.S. Department of State (DOS) to Vientiane Embassy, October 26, 1963, President's Lyndon B. Johnson's Presidential Library (LBJPL), quoted in Mike Rattanasengchanh, "The Beginning of the Bombing of Laos, 1964," unpublished paper presented before the American Studies Association, 2024.

[131] Telegram from DOS to Vientiane Embassy, November 8, 1963, LBJPL, quoted in Mike Rattanasengchanh, "The Beginning of the Bombing of Laos, 1964," unpublished paper presented before the American Studies Association,

in the form of "two hundred 500 lb bombs and fuses." State Department officials left much of the discretion of future use to embassy in Vientiane, opening the door and authority to expand the bombings—which would go on to devastate Laos—in future years.[132]

Kennedy's Arch-Imperialistic Foreign Policy in the Rest of Southeast Asia

Kennedy's support for counter-revolution in Indochina followed from his deep-rooted opposition to the Maoist revolution in China and desire to uphold U.S. military dominance in Southeast Asia. As a Congressman in 1949, Kennedy had lamented how an ally [Chiang Kai Shek] whose "freedom we once fought to preserve," had been "frittered away" by "our diplomats and president [Harry S. Truman]."[133] After the Chinese intervention in the Korean War, Kennedy demanded that Truman unleash Chiang Kai Shek's troops against them while sponsoring a congressional bill that would have imposed a rigid embargo of any goods to China and prohibited American economic or financial assistance to any foreign country that permitted export of materials to China or Hong Kong that could be useful to its war effort.[134]

According to historian Michael Schaller, Kennedy and his senior foreign policy advisers such as Dean Rusk and Robert S. McNamara remained wary of China's motives and behavior in the early 1960s and supported an increase in military spending and development of a "flexible response" capable of countering both nuclear threats and Chinese supported insurgencies.[135] Kennedy promised Chiang Kai Shek, whom the CIA had helped install as ruler of Taiwan, that the U.S. would exercise its veto if the UN voted to admit China to its ranks, and Kennedy tacitly approved addiitonal covert raids from Taiwan on the Chinese mainland, supplying equipment for limited airdrops and amphibious raids.[136]

According to Dean Rusk, Kennedy was "much harder on China" and "less willing to consider a more flexible approach than Lyndon Johnson."[137] Rejecting the sale of three to five million tons of wheat to famine stricken China and opposed to the possibility of resuming trade, Kennedy praised Taiwan's human rights record compared to China even though Chiang Kai-Shek's government "was a police state imposed on an unwilling Taiwanese people," to quote historian Richard J. Walton. Kennedy claimed that China under Mao had entered its "Stalinist phase" and "seemed prepared to sacrifice 300 million people if necessary to dominate Asia."[138]

2024. The Kennedy administration also sent photo reconaissance teams over Laos to photograph Pathet Lao positions.

[131] Telegram from DOS to Vientiane Embassy, November 8, 1963, LBJPL, quoted in Rattanasengchanh, "The Beginning of the Bombing of Laos, 1964."

[131] Telegram from DOS to Vientiane Embassy, November 8, 1963, LBJPL, quoted in Rattanasengchanh, "The Beginning of the Bombing of Laos, 1964."

[132] See Fred Branfman, *Voices From the Plain of Jars: Life Under an Air War* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

[133] Schaller, *The United States and China,* 138.

[134] Lasky, *JFK*, 124.

[135] Schaller, *The United States and China,* 139.

[136] Schaller, *The United States and China,* 140. On Kennedy's China policy, see Noam Kachavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated: China Policy During the Kennedy Years* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002).

[137] Walton, *Cold War and Counter-Revolution*, 225.

[138] Walton, *Cold War and Counter-Revolution*, 227; Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy*, 253. Averell Harriman and Chester Bowles had supported sending wheat to China and resuming trade.

This was a misleading statement that demonized Mao while obscuring the very real efforts of the U.S. to sacrifice millions of Southeast Asian people in order to dominate the region militarily.

According to historian Gordon K. Chang, fear of the PRC obtaining nuclear weapons led Kennedy to pursue the possibility of taking military action with the Soviet Union against China's nuclear installation.[139] The Kennedy administration efforts to shore up the U.S. alliance with Japan as a Chinese counterweight was reflected in the appointment of Edwin O. Reischauer as U.S. ambassador to Japan. Reischauer was a Harvard professor with CIA connections who extolled the value of the 169 U.S. military bases in Japan as a form of insurance that Japan would "not fall or gravitate into Communist hands or into a neutralist position."[140] Japan was ruled at the time by the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which had been heavily financed by the CIA. The Special Group on Counter-Insurgency sanctioned not only a continuation of this funding but also a covert operation to infiltrate Japan's left, especially the giant trade union Sohyo, with the goal of splintering and weakening it.[141] Kennedy himself made a point of lecturing a Japanese audience about how the U.S. required Japanese help in containing "the rise of the communist power in China combined with an expansionist Stalinist philosophy."[142] Kennedy also revealingly ignored a petition from Okinawa [Ryukus] islanders calling for the removal of U.S. military bases there.[143]

In order for Japan to be able to pay for the U.S. military bases, the Kennedy administration encouraged strengthening economic cooperation and expansion of Japanese exports, including in South Korea, whose economy the U.S. had sought to better integrate with Japan since the time of the Korean War.[144] When it appeared that the South Korean people were on the verge of unifying north and south peacefully in 1961, the Kennedy administration helped engineer a coup d'état involving 3,600 troops. An army Colonel, Chung Hee Park emerged as the director and was quickly acclaimed by President Kennedy. The Kennedy administration lavished aid on Park as he smashed everyone who wanted to unify Korea. Journalist David W. Conde characterized Park as a "mechanized puppet of the CIA," whom, he said, was able to "exercise tremendous power over his masters in Washington through the threat to fail to repel the mythical invasion from the communists in North Korea." The puppet show involving Park was not a comedy, Conde added, "but a historical fact of corruption, degradation, and violence."[145]

Historian Timothy P. Maga notes that in 1961 Kennedy had warned his Cabinet that America must "hold the beachhead" in Japan as well as the Philippines. JFK favored expanding

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[139] Gordon K. Chang, "JFK, China and the Bomb," *Journal of American History,* March 1988, 1287.
[140] John W. Dower, *The Clash: U.S.-Japanese Relations Throughout History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 335.
[141] Dower, *The Clash,* 356.
[142] Dower, *The Clash,* 356.
[143] Timothy P. Maga, *John F. Kennedy and the New Pacific Community, 1961-63* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 109.
[144] Maga, *John F. Kennedy and the New Pacific Community, 1961-63*, 9. For the larger strategy pertaining to Korea going back to the end of World War II, see Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, Volume 1 (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981).
[145] Conde, *CIA—Core of the Cancer*, 113. The leader of the anticommunist witchunt following the coup was Chung Hee Park's brother-in-law, Colonel Chong Pil Kim, who helped to establish the Korean CIA. Kim was later given temporary exile in the U.S. during which time he was honored by two universities. General Chang D. Young was a figurehead of the military junta who enrolled later as student at Michigan State University, a school with strong CIA ties

military and economic aid to the Philippines so the U.S. could assure a secure presence for its large naval and air force presence there, which was necessary for the attack on Vietnam.[146] The Kennedy adminstration expanded police training programs that were used as a cover for CIA operations designed to suppress remnants of the Hukbalahap, a left-wing Filipino group that had fought the Japanese invaders in World War II and promoted land reform. The Kennedy adminstration also expanded police training programs in Thailand where they had contributed to development of a police state. Police aid was channeled to the CIA trained Police Aerial Reconaissance Unit (PARU) and Thai Border Patrol Police (BPP), which kept tabs on local reds and played an instrumental role in the secret war in Laos.[147]

According to Timothy P. Maga, Kennedy took special interest in improving living conditions in the Pacific islands, including Guam and Micronesia, from his time as a Pacific War veteran, though wanted to better integrate them into Cold War designs and approved a top-secret military study that planned to increase military personnel on the Marianas islands, particularly on Guam and Saipan. The latter were considered "forgotten provinces of the American empire." Robert S. McNamara called them "America's line of anti-communist defense in the Far East."[148] The most controversial aspect of the military study Kennedy approved was its proposal to stock Anderson Air Force base in Guam with nuclear weapons and to build a nuclear strike task force in the Pacific.[149]

Kennedy's admirers give him credit for trying to normalize relations with Indonesia's socialist government led by Achmed Sukarno when the Kennedy's administration's strategy in Indonesia was the exact same as it was in Laos. The goal was to draw Sukarno—a Cold War neutralist like Souvanna Phouma—into an alliance with right-wing Generals and to foster a split between him and the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), an equivalent of the Pathet Lao that was the largest communist party in Southeast Asia. Robert Kennedy played a key role by visiting Indonesia with the purpose of "ending Sukarno's dalliance with the communists," according to historian Rudy Abramson.[150] During that visit, Kennedy met with General Suharto—Indonesia's equivalent of Phoumi Nosavan, who went on to lead a 1965 coup backed by the CIA, which resulted in the murder of over one million suspected PKI members and ethnic Chinese.[151]

Kennedy's administration set the groundwork for the 1965 coup—as was admitted by CIA Deputy Director Robert Amory—by expanding the budget for police training programs designed to create a police paramilitary force to counter elements in the army that were loyal to Sukarno, who was never trusted because of his left-leanings. Future Phoenix Program director Robert Komer expressed hope in discussion with the CI that the police mobile brigade could "lay the groundwork for our returning and expanding influence in Indonesia in the years and decades

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[146] Maga, *John F. Kennedy and the New Pacific Community, 1961-63*, 11, 71.
[147] Kuzmarov, *Modernizing Repression*, chapter 5. In Cambodia, Prince Sihanouk barred police aid after he became convinced the programs were being used by the CIA to support oppositional elements that were trying to kill him.
[148] Maga, *John F. Kennedy and the New Pacific Community, 1961-1963,* , 22, 23, 24. The CIA housed a secret base in Saipan for training Chinese nationalists to one day reinvade mainland China.
[149] Maga, *John F. Kennedy and the New Pacific Community, 1961-1963,* 22, 23, 24.
[150] Rudy Abramson, *Spanning the Century: The Life of W. Averell Harriman, 1891-1986* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1992), 603.
[151] For details on the killings and role of Barack Obama's mother and stepfather in them, see Wayne Madsen, *The Manufacturing of a* President (self-published, 2012)

to come." OPS Director Byrone Engle received assurance from Indonesia's Minister of Police that in the event that the communists illegally tried to seize power (which the CIA would initiate), the mobile brigade would "fight to the last man." In the event of a legal takeover, he added, they would resist "by any means available, including underground operations."[152]

To help in the success of these latter ends, the OPS under Kennedy's direction build up the Indonesian police and Mobrig's countersubversive capabillities, providing it with military grade weapons and riot control gear, including tear gas cannisters. Henry Samorski recommended establishing "goon squads" consisting of uniformed civilans who could be "put into action at a moment's notice." Orders were given to deal firmly with pro-communist demonstrations and to protect U.S. owned rubber plantations and oil companies, which it was feared Sukarno was bent on expropriating.[153]

Inoculating Latin America From Castro Style Socialism

Kennedy's personal qualities may account for his enduring popularity in Latin America, but Stephen G. Rabe's 1999 study, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World: John F. Kennedy Confronts Communist Revolution in Latin America* shows that Kennedy was a Cold Warrior who supported the military's takeover in numerous Latin America countries. His economic development program, the Alliance for Progress, was undermined by what Arthur Schlesinger Jr. termed "the ghastly illusion of counterinsurgency," which "distorted and perverted the Alliance's reformist goals."[154]

As Rabe shows Kennedy acted out of fear that Latin America was "ripe for revolution" following the success of the Cuban revolution. After the failure of the Bay of Pigs, the Kennedy brothers had vowed to make Cuban revolutionary leader Fidel Castro and his communist supporters "pay for staining the family's honor."[155] The Kennedy's became obsessed with removing Castro, initiating the infamous Operation Mongoose whose purpose was to "bring the terrors of the earth to Cuba," in Bobby's words. Mongoose sanctioned continued paramilitary raids backed by the CIA and ramping up of covert operations, and imposition of a near total economic blockade in February 1962 in response to nationalization of American properties by Cuban authorities. (the goal of the blockade was to create severe economic hardship for the Cuban population, prompting them to try and overthrow the Castro government).[156]

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[152] Kuzmarov, *Modernizing Repression*, 104.
[153] Kuzmarov, *Modernizing Repression*, 104.
[154] Stephen G. Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World: John F. Kennedy Confronts Communist Revolution in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 5.
[155] Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World,* 20.
[156] https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/cuba/2019-10-03/kennedy-cuba-operation-mongoose; Don Bohning, *The Castro Obsession: U.S. Covert Operations Against Cuba, 1959-1965* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2005); Hersh *The Dark Side of Camelot*, ch. 17 details the Kennedy's zeal in the attempt to remove Fidel Castro and how his Cuba policy alienated elements of the CIA who felt he was pursuing a personal vendetta against Castro that had nothing to do with national security while having only adopted half hearted measures at the Bay of Pigs. On the question of assassination, James N. Giglio says that it is uncertain whether John F. Kennedy knew of the efforts to kill Castro, though Senator George Smathers (D-Fl) testified as did others that Kennedy had discussed the question and a Senate intelligence committee investigation in 1975 raised the possibility that authority came from Kennedy. Giglio adds that "there is no doubt that Robert Kennedy knew about the plan [to assasinate Castro]—and enthusiastically supported it. He objected only after finding out in May 1962 that the CIA was employing mafia

Expanded on an existing Eisenhower-era program, the Alliance for Progress was conceived as a Marshall Plan for the rest of Latin America that would "immunize Latin American societies against radicalism," and spread of Cuban style socialism.[157] USAID devoted a portion of its budget to police training programs that trained and equipped Latin American police forces to contain urban riots and combat left-wing guerrillas.[158] Up until 1960, a primary goal of U.S. military assistance programs in Latin America was the development of strong naval capability, military intelligence, and air power; however, when the Kennedy administration took office in 1961, the threat of armed revolution became the major concern, with the basis for military aid shifting from "hemispheric defense" to "internal security" and protection against Castro-communist guerrilla warfare, resulting in a spike in human rights abuses.[159]

Expanded U.S. military aid (the Kennedy administration increased military aid to Latin America by 50%) fueled at least six coups during Kennedy's short presidency.[160] Kennedy broke with Eisenhower's support for dictators like Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic, instead preferring anticommunist reformers like Arturo Frondizi of Argentina and Romulo Betancourt of Venezuela who could help raise living standards under the framework of a free-enterprise economy and hence more effectively innoculate their countries' from a Castro-style revolution.[161] Based on National Security adviser Walt W. Rostow's modernization theory, the Kennedy administration's foreign policy was designed to ensure that Latin American countries transition to modernization proceeded in an "evolutionary" and not revolutionary manner.[162]

This kind of rhetoric, howeer, masked support for U.S. business interests as model reformers like Frondizi and Betancourt enacted measures favoring multi-national corporations—in the latter case, the Rockefeller-owned Standard Oil, which controlled 95 percent of Venezuela's largest oil company, Creole Petroleum. A police aid program helped Betancourt crack down harshly on left-wing groups promoting a nationalization policy that would allow oil revenues to genuinely improve living standards for the masses—as later took place under Hugo Chavez.[163]

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elements to kill Castro; he was "mad as hell" after hearing that Sam Giancana and John Roselli, who faced Justice Department investigations, were involved." Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy*, 65.

[157] Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World,* 8. Kennedy referred to the Alliance in March 1962 to his friend Sernator George Smathers as a program which he believed could "successfully counter the communist onslaught in the hemisphere." Parmet, *JFK*, 221.

[158] Kuzmarov, *Modernizing Repression*.

[159] Charles Maechling Jr., "Counterinsurgency: The First Ordeal By Fire," in *Low Intensity Warfare: Counterinsurgency, Proinsurgency, and Antiterrorism in the Eighties*, eds. Michael T. Klare and Peter Kornbluh (New York: Pantheon, 1988).

[160] Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World*; Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy*, 252.

[161] Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World,* 11.

[162] Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World,* 26.

[163] Kuzmarov, *Modernizing Repression*, 210. Bruce Miroff wrote that during Betancourt's presidential term (1959-1964), "the economic structure of Venezuela remained virtualy unaltered," with the "massive dominating power of foreign companies over Venezuela's oil resources going unchallenged," and "new enterprises serving as outlets for American corporations." A land reform program did little to challenge the concentration of land ownership among a tiny minority. Ans as left wing agitation grew, affecting even units of the Venezueland military, government repression was intensified and constitutionally guaranteed civil liberties were eradicated. Miroff, *Pragmatic Illusions*, 125.

In the Dominican Republic, where U.S. sugar companies had long dominated the economy, the Kennedy adminstration sanctioned the assassination of Trujillo, and then supported his replacement with Joaquin Belaguer, Trujillo's former Vice President who was assured of military aid to help him "stop a Castroist invasion."[164] When Belaguer's regime was threatened, the Kenndy administation sent a U.S. Air Force Carrier but refused to do the same to help save the regime of Juan Bosch, a popular anti-Trujillo intellectual who "failed the administration's rigorous anti-communist test," according to Rabe."[165] Bosch was judged by Dean Rusk and George Ball to be "an impractical dreamer, lacking administrative skills," though in a brief period in power shepherded through the Dominican assembly a modern constitution that created a secular state and protected the rights of workers.[166]

Development aid under the Alliance in Bolivia was used to prop up the repressive regime of Victor Paz Esenssoro, whose inner-circle was filled with ex-Nazis, and to equip Indian militias charged with eliminating two left-wing labor leaders. Kennedy administration officials used the lever of aid to pressure Esenssoro to adopt economic austerity measures and to purge left-wing elements from public sector unions while enhanced military aid helped set the groundwork for a 1964 military coup.[167]

In Guyana. the Alliance was also used deviously as a cover for the CIA to organize strikes and demonstrations that helped to bring down socialist leader Cheddi Jagan who was replaced by the corrupt Forbes Burnham. Documents have emerged indicating that Kennedy met secretly with top national security officers to give direct orders to unseat Jagan.[168] Arthur Schlesinger Jr. confessed in 1990 at a conference attended by Jagan to feeling badly about his role thirty years ago in helping to facilitate Jagan's ouster, stating that "a great injustice was done to Cheddi Jagan" and by implication to the Guyanese people.[169]

Another injustice was done to the people of Colombia, where the Kennedy administration launched a brutal counterinsurgency operation, Plan Lazo, targeting the Fuerzas Armada Reolucionario de Colombia (FARC), followed by an even more aggressive operation involving the use of napalm called Operation Marquetelia. As demonstrations and strikes gripped Bogota

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[164] Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World,* 41. After Trujillo's ouster, Kennedy told an aide that there are "three possibilities in descending order of preference: a decent democratic regime, a continuation of the Trujillo regime or a Castroist regime. We ought to aim at the first, but we really can't renounce the second u til we are sure that we can avoid the thid." Journalist Richard Walton wrote that these comments demonstrated "Kennedy's misunderstanding of revolution: he was prepared to see a continuation of the despicable Trujillo regime rather than permit the Dominican people to choose a leftist or communist government. One can only wonder what gave Kennedy the right to make such a decision for the people of another country." Walton, *Cold War and Counterrevolution*, 207.

[165] Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World,* 44; Walton, *Cold War and Counterrevolution*, 209.

[166] Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World,* 45. When Bosch was ousted in a military coup in September 1963, Kennedy soon thereafter resumed normal diplomatic relations with the Dominican Republic. His administration had refused to support a purge of pro-Trujillo elements in the armed forces and police, which were bolstered by U.S. police and military aid.

[167] Thomas C. Field Jr. *From Development to Dictatorship: Bolivia and the Alliance For Progress in the Kennedy Era* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

[168] Hersh, *The Dark Side of Camdelot*, 266.

[169] Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World,* 94; Stephen G. Rabe, *U.S. Intervention in British guiana: A Cold War Story* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005). Ronald Radosh wrote in American Labor and United States Foreign Policy that the overthrow of Jagan's government was "engineered

against a conservative leader (Guillermo Leon Valencia Munoz), the OPS stepped up police training efforts, bringing in an intelligence specialist with counterinsurgency experience in Malaya (where the British had subdued an anti-colonial revolt).[170]

In Brazil, Kennedy administration policies set the groundwork for a military coup against Joao Goulart, a social reformer like Bosch who was sympathetic to the ideals of the Cuban revolution. According to Rabe, leftist unions in Brazil were fought with a new Cold War weapons, the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), whose mission was to counter the "threat of Castroist infiltration and eventual control of major labor movements within Latin America."[171] For a period from 1961 to 1963, AIFLD received over $41 million from the CIA through conduits like the J.M Kaplan and Gotham Funds.[172] The AIFLD helped to undermine Goulart by organizing strikes and demonstrations against him, while sending for training abroad Brazilians who led a general strike against Goulart in April 1964. After Goulart's overthrow by the military, Robert F. Kennedy expressed satisfaction, stating that "Brazil would have gone communist," if Goulart had not been deposed.[173]

In Guatemala, the Kennedy administration enacted measures to block the return to power of Juan José Arévalo, Guatemala's president from 1945 to 1951, who was elected as Guatemala's first democratic leader following a popular uprising against U.S.-backed dictator Jorge Ubico who served the interests of the United Fruit Company, which had owned most of Guatemala's best land. Kennedy judged Arévalo to be "quite a risk," while Secretary of State Dean Rusk called him "a menace."[174] Arévalo was particularly disliked because he had published a devastating indictment of U.S. imperialism, *The Shark and the Sardines* (an English version of the book appeared in 1961), which lamented the "subordination of the White House" to a "syndicate of millionaires" intent on "plundering Latin America's natural resources in order to sustain North America's industrial productivity and get even richer."[175]

When Guatemalan President Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes (1958-1963)—who had allowed Guatemala to be used as a staging base for the Bay of Pigs—let Arévalo back into Guatemala, the CIA said that he had acted duplicitously and supported a military coup led by Colonel Enrique Peralta Azurdia. On the day of the coup, the Kennedy administration inquired whether the new regime needed equipment to put down potential public disorder. A 1,400 man battle group was also readied in the Panama Canal zone and U.S. Navy ships were dispatched to patrol sea lanes between Guatemala and Cuba, even though the U.S. Navy found no evidence of Cuban military intervention in Guatemala.[176] Between 1961 and 1963, the Kennedy administration sent $4.3 million in military aid to Guatemala, compared to $950,000 in military aid that Eisenhower

[170] Kuzmarov, *Modernizing Repression*, 212, 213.
[171] Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World,* 69. Rabe notes that between 1962 and 1967, AIFLD received $15.4 million, or 89 percent of its budget, from Alliance for Progress funds.
[172] Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World,* 69.
[173] Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World,* 69, 70.
[174] Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World,* 74.
[175] Juan José Arévalo, *The Shark and the Sardines* (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1961).
[176] Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World,* 73.

delivered between 1956 and 1960, and began providing Guatemalan military officers with counterinsurgency training in a new center established in Guatemala.[177]

The Guatemalan case points to the imperialistic nature of Kennedy's foreign policies, which were designed to benefit U.S. business interests like many of his predecessors and successors. In an attempt to forestall Latin American governments from following the Cuban example, Kennedy signed or did not try and block new laws that banned countries who did not sign an investment guaranty treaty with the U.S. from receiving foreign aid and cut off foreign aid to any country which either nationalized or placed excessive tax burdens on corporations owned by Americans.[178] Kennedy also used aid leverage to try and block laws from being enacted that would result in expropriation of American companies or confiscation of fallow landholdings of Standard Oil and the United Fruit company.[179] Most of the Alliance aid was in the form of loans that were contingent on governments adopting a policy of monetary and fiscal stabilization ie. credit restraints and balanced budgets that ruled out deficit financing for measures like agrarian reform or public works to alleviate unemployment.[180] Much American assistance could only be used to purchase commodities in the U.S. at American prices, creating a subsidy for American business.[181]

At a 1961 Organization of American States (OAS) conference, Che Guevara denounced the Alliance for Progress as a "vehicle designed to separate the people of Cuba from the other peoples of Latin America, to sterilize the example of the Cuban Revolution, and then to subdue the other peoples according to imperialism's instructions…" Guevara later wrote in an essay posthumously published in 1968, which stated that "the projects of the Alliance for Progress are nothing more than imperialist attempts to block the development of the revolutionary conditions of the people by sharing a small quantity of the profits with the native exploiting classes, thus making them into firm allies against the highly exploited classes." Guevara further considered the Alliance a policy to bring Latin American economies in line with the interests of "the monopolies," allowing for the cheaper extraction of raw materials through the building of road infrastructure and keeping labor costs down, while "lessening internal discontent in each Latin American country by making minor concessions to the people . . . on conditions that these countries surrender their interests completely and renounce their own development."[182]

Guevara's analysis contradicts that belief that Kennedy adopted altruistic policies designed purely to "mitigate poverty in the developing world, fortify the middle class, expand personal freedoms and human rights, advance democracy, and push back against autocracy and oligarchy," as Robert F. Kennedy described his uncle's policies under the Alliance for

[177] Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World,* 73. The State Department tried to pressure Peralta to restore constitutionalism leading to the election of a "non-extremist liberal government," and precluding the election of Arévalo "or any other extremist or pro-communist candidate"—which is what the Kennedy administration aimed to protect Guatemala against.
[178] Miroff, *Pragmatic Illusions*, 137, 138.
[179] Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy*, 251.
[180] Miroff, *Pragmatic Illusions*, 138.
[181] Miroff, *Pragmatic Illusions*, 139.
[182] "Che Guevara Exposes US Alliance for Progress," *The Militant*, 20 January 2003, p. 1.

Progress.[183] Kennedy Jr. claims that "following JFK's murder, military and corporate interests within President Lyndon Johnson's administration coopted USAID into working for the CIA."[184] However, it was Kennedy who established the OPS within USAID under the direction of known CIA agent Byron Engle, and it was Kennedy who set in motion a lot of the policies that resulted in military interventions or coups carried out by the Johnson administration.

Africa and Kennedy's Phony Anti-colonialism

Kennedy's intellectual admirers herald their hero for allegedly opposing the Eisenhower administration's decision to assassinate Patrice Lumumba, the first Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) who had wanted to reclaim local control over the DRC's mineral wealth. David Doyle, the chief of the CIA base in Elizabethville, however, said that Kennedy backed plans to remove Lumumba. He wrote in his memoir, *True Men and Traitors*: "President Eisenhower *and* President elect John Kennedy wanted Lumumba removed from power and had discreetly made that clear to the CIA."[185] According to historian Richard D. Mahoney, when Ghanaian leader Kwame Nkrumah sent a personal appeal to Kennedy to intercede to save Lumumba, Kennedy did nothing.[186] After Lumumba's assassination, Kennedy supported anti-Lumumba politicians, Joseph Kasavubu and Cyril Adoula and not Antoine Gizenga who was pro-Lumumba.

Since 1959, Adoula had carefully been groomed for his role as leader of the DRC by Howard Imbrey and other CIA agents. Closely associated with CIA-backed International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, Adoula, who split with Lumumba in 1959, was strongly anticommunist, and supported by the Binza group, which also received CIA subsidies.[187] U.S. Abassador to the UN Philip M. Klutznick compared Adoula to Alexander Kerensky, the western backed leader that replaced the czar in the first phase of the Russian revolution, whose conservative policies led to his downfall.[188] Historian Herbert Parmet wrote that "Adoula had no regional or tribal backing and lacked faithful followers. His only real power—the force that got him elected and supplied the necessary apparatus to keep him in power—was the CIA."[189]

Political scientist William Mountz wrote that the Kennedy administration employed bribery, blackmail and threats to ensure Adoula's election in 1961 over the more popular Gizenga, Lumumba's former Deputy Prime Minister who was imprisoned on the island Bula Mbemba after he accused Adoula of treason.[190] In a triumphalist memo to Kennedy, titled

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[183] Robert F. Kennedy Jr. *The Wuhan Covr-up and the Terrifying Bioweapons Arms Race* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2023), 215.
[184] Kennedy Jr. *The Wuhan Covr-up and the Terrifying Bioweapons Arms Race,* 215.
[185] Williams, *White Malice,* 402; David Doyle, *True Men and Traitors: From the OSS to the CIA: My Life in the Shadows* (Diane Publishing, 2004).
[186] Mahoney, *JFK,* 245.
[187] Williams, *White Malice,* 402.
[188] Mahoney, *JFK*, 110.
[189] Parmet, *JFK*, 317, citing Richard Mahoney's 1979 Ph.D. dissertation at John Hopkins University entitled "The Kennedy Policy in the Congo, 1961-1963."
[190] William Mountz, "The Congo Crisis: A Reexamination, 1960-1965," *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa,* 5, 2 (2014), 151-165; "Man in the News: Congo Caretaker Cyrille Adoula," *The New York Times*, July 1, 1964, https://www.nytimes.com/1964/07/01/archives/man-in-the-news-congo-caretaker-cyrille-adoula.html; Thomas Noer, "New Frontiers and Old Priorities in Africa," in *Kennedy's Quest For Victory*, ed. Paterson, 263, 264.

"Adoula Victory," after the election, Secretary of State Dean Rusk wrote that "an Adoula victory removes any legal basis for Gizenga to claim that his regime is the legal government of the Congo. It is the second Soviet defeat in the Congo."[191]

Afterwards, Kennedy gave secret approval to new Secretary-General U Thant to expand military operations if needed to back up Adoula's authority and established a police training program headed by Vietnam veterans that was championed by Robert F. Kennedy.[192] Historian Richard Mahoney wrote that Kennedy "permitted the CIA to shore up the right wing in case Adoula's center coalition fell prey to the left wing," which Kennedy was always against.[193] Police and military operations combined with Adoula's misrule helped trigger guerrilla revolts in Kwilu and Kivu provinces led by Lumumba supporters that the CIA was called on to help suppress.[194] Historian George Nzongala Ntlaja called Adoula's government basically a puppet regime responsive to General Joseph Mobutu, who had become a terrible kingmaker and took directions from the U.S. embassy in Kinshasa.[195] Mobutu was the head of the DRC's army who played a central role in Lumumba's assassination and came to rule the DRC with an iron-fist with U.S. backing through the mid 1990s.[196]

In May 1963, Kennedy praised Mobutu in a White House visit, marking his administration's support for among Africa's most notorious dictators. Turning to Mobutu, Kennedy said: "General, if it hadn't been for you, the whole thing would have collapsed and the communists would have taken over."[197] When Mobutu asked for a command plane to carry out parachute training, Kennedy granted the request, saying that there is "nobody in the world who had done more than Mobutu to maintain freedom against communism."[198] Left unsaid was that Mobutu was close with Maurice Templesman, a partner in Leon Tempelsman & Son, which has lucrative mining interests throughout Africa, and financier of the Africa-America Institute, a CIA front involved in propaganda and bringing African leaders to study in the U.S.[199] Mobutu and Templesman shared ownership interests in Zaire's two main diamond mining concerns, MIBA and Britmond, and Mobutu helped Templesman gain ownership stakes in the Tenke Fungurume Mining Company, a major copper mining firm which Tempelsman had helped form.

Tempelsman had very close ties with John F. Kennedy, supporting him in the 1960 election and arranging a meeting between Kennedy and Harry Oppenheimer, the famous South African investor. Becoming Jackie Kennedy's lover after JFK's death, Templesman employed

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Dean Rusk ordered an all-out campaign to block Gizenga's ascension and Adoula supporters were offered cash and cars. The U.S. also threatened a coup if Gizenga won the election.

[191] Williams, *White Malice,* 437.

[192] Mountz, "The Congo Crisis;" Kuzmarov, *Modernizing Repression*, 176, 177.

[193] Mahoney, *JFK*, 223.

[194] See Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Washington, and Havana in Africa, 1959-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

[195] Williams, *White Malice,* 437.

[196] See Sean Kelley, *America's Tyrant: The CIA and Zaire* (Washington, D.C. American University Press, 1993).

[197] Mahoney, *JFK*, 228.

[198] Mahoney, *JFK*, 228, 229.

[199] During the 1960/61 Congo crisis, Templesman reportedly "worked hand in glove with the CIA station in Congo," according to political scientist David Gibbs. This close working relationship was evident when Templesman hired Larry Devlin, the CIA's station chief in Congo from 1960 to 1967, to work for him after Devlin left the CIA (if he ever did).

Kennedy aide Theodore Sorenson, whom Mobutu hired to represent the Congo in a dispute with Belgian mining companies, as a lawyer, and Kennedy's Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara as a lobbyist.[200]

By failing to explore the relationship between Kennedy and Templesman, Kennedy's intellectual admirers distort the nature Kennedy's commitment to anti-colonialism. This commitment was predicated on the desire to break European economic monopolies over mining and other major industries so that American investors could buy them up. The latter is exactly what happened in the DRC where the Kennedy administration worked to destroy Lumumbaism. When Moise Tshombe launched a secessionist rebellion in Katanga province, Kennedy aligned with the UN in supporting the suppression of the rebellion by Mobutu and the Congolese army. A main reason was because a) the Kennedy administration wanted to reintegrate Katanga with the central government that was now anticommunist and a strategic proxy of the U.S.[201]; b) Tshombe was an agent of the Belgians and Templesman, Rockefeller and other wealthy U.S. investors wanted to gain ownership of Katanga's mining industry, which had been in the hands of Belgian interests.

Seen in this context, Kennedy's opposition to Katanga secession was not because of any commitment to human rights compared with Eisenhower or the right-wing Katanga Lobby headed by the corrupt Senator Thomas J. Dodd (D-CT) whom Kennedy confronted. The U.S. government supported Tshombe and Katanga secession when Lumumba was in charge because Lumumba wanted to establish DRC government control over Katanga mining operations.[202] But when it was U.S. investors who stood to gain, then the movement for Katanga secession was no longer a fashionable cause but identified as a reactionary one.

In line with the interests of Templesman and other wealthy Democratic Party donors, the Kennedy adminstration generally favored conservative nationalist leaders in Africa, like Emperor Haillie Selassie of Ethiopia, where the Kennedy administration expanded police training programs intended to quell what Roger Hilsman, director of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligenand Research, called "pseudo populist revolts."[203] Kennedy extended police aid further to the Tubman regime which had turned Liberia to into a plantation for Firestone Rubber and repressed the African minority; to the brutal Tombalbaye regime in Chad, to Libya's King Idris, and to Houphouet Boigny in the Ivory Coast, a French puppet who was the type of postcolonial leader Frantz Fanon warned about in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952)—one who sought to emulate European mores, denigrated African culture, and essentially kow-towed to Western interests.[204]

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[200] David N. Gibbs, *The Political Economy of Third World Intervention: Mines, Money, and U.S. Policy in the Congo Crisis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 110, 173. Sorenson's intelligence connections were apparent in his nomination by Jimmy Carter in 1977 to be CIA Director. John F. Kennedy, Jr., spent a summer working for Tempelsman in Africa. A 1964 National Security Council document referred to Tempelsman as a "heavy contributor in Democratic politics." He was considered a "kingpin" of state politics in New York, supporting the Eleanor Roosevelt-Herbert Lehman reform group, according to Stephen Weissman. ↑

[201] Parmet, *JFK*, 318.

[202] See Gibbs, *The Political Economy of Third World Intervention.*

[203] Kuzmarov, *Modernizing Repression*, 168, 169.

[204] Kuzmarov, *Modernizing Repression*, 167-172. In 1963, Kennedy made U.S. per capita aid to Liberia the highest in the world. Philip E. Muehlenbeck, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: John F. Kennedy's Courting of African National*

Besides Templesman, the Rockefellers were another major driver of U.S. foreign policy in the DRC; their influence was carried out through Secretary of State Dean Rusk, a former director of the Rockefeller Foundation. The Rockefellers were shareholders in Tanganyika Concessions Limited, which owned copper and uranium mines in Katanga, financed Templesman's Congo ventures, and owned stock with the Guggenheim group in Forminière, a Belgian mining operation in Kasai province, directly north of Katanga. Additionally, the Rockefellers acquired in full, or in part, a textile plant, an automobile distributor operation, a pineapple processor, a metal can producer, and a mineral prospecting firm in the Congo. The Rockefeller-controlled Socony-Vacuum Oil Company further owned service stations and gasoline storage terminals worth a total of twelve million dollars.[205]

The Rockefellers and Templesman's lucrative investments in Africa extended to Ghana where Kennedy enacted policies that lay the groundwork for the 1966 CIA backed coup that resulted in the overthrow of Kwame Nkrumah, a pan-Africanist who wanted to unify Africa under socialism. According to historian Susan Williams, U.S. ambassador to Ghana Francis Russell was given the green light for a coup against Nkrumah by the Kennedy administration, who had previously made receipt of foreign aid contingent on Nkrumah endorsing political freedom and private enterprise and making a pledge never to expropriate American investments in Ghana.[206] Russell was told by New Frontiersman in Washington that if he thought ousting Nkrumah was a good idea, he could call on Ghanaian Finance Minister, Komla Gdemah, a friend of Maurice Templesman, and say "that the department appreciated the position that he was taking, and they could count on the support of the American government if he should decide to take certain steps."[207]

According to Williams, Gdemeah plotted a coup against Nkrumah with the CIA and Templesman and his agent in Accra, one Mr. Grosse.[208] Kennedy cut funding of the Volta dam project that would have aided Ghana's economic development, telling Under Secretary of State George Ball to transfer funds elsewhere in Africa so"we wouldn't loook like we pulled the rug on Africa—just Ghana," where Kennedy said he had "given up on Nkrumah" who has "been unecessariy difficult with us."[209]

In South Africa, Kennedy refused to take significants action to pressure the apartheid government, partly because of the urging of Dean Rusk and others who recognized that the U.S. traded more with South Africa than with any other African nation and depended on its valuable minerals, including diamonds, gold and manganese. The Kennedy administration refused to apply sanctions, cut trade or provide any funding to the African National Congress (ANC), whose leader, Nelson Mandela, was arrested with CIA collaboration during Kennedy's

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Leaders (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 151. Muehlebberg reports that there was a 633 percent increase in Washington's aid program in Liberia since Kennedy had entered the White House.

[205] Gerard Colby and Charlotte Dennett, *Thy Will Be Done: The Conquest of the Amazon: Nelson Rockefeller and Evangelism in the Age of Oil* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 326; Gibbs, *The Political Economy of Third World Intervention*, 67, 182, 189.

[206] Williams, *White Malice,* 445; Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy*, 244.

[207] Williams, *White Malice,* 445.

[208] Williams, *White Malice,* 446; Mahoney, *JFK*, 173, 174.

[209] Williams, *White Malice,* 446.

presidency. Kennedy also failed to support a UN Security Council resolution calling for a total arms embargo or for South Africa's expulsion. Instead, Kennedy announced a unilateral arms embargo to go into effect on January 1, 1964, though the American action contained an escape clause permitting the purchase of spare military parts, which ensured that the gesture was largely symbolic and would have no effect on South Africa's racial policies.[210]

Kennedy's commitment to the U.S. empire of military bases was evident in Angola, where Kennedy backed off the issue of independence in order to preserve U.S. access to the Azores military bases in Portugal, which had colonized Angola.[211] The CIA authorized covert funding to Holden Roberto, Mobutu's brother-in-law and a leader of the anticommunist faction of the anti-colonial movement who received a $6,000 retainer through the CIA station in Leopoldville.[212] Roberto had been first on CIA payroll in 1955 and was favored by the Kennedy administration over Augustino Neto and other leaders of the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), which was left-leaning and allied with Antoine Gizenga. Rusk wrote in a cable that "department considers Roberto genuine noncommunist nationalist and believes his continued control of Angolan nationalist movement in our best interest." The trinity of Mobutu, Adoula and Roberto—each one backed and funded by the CIA—destroyed any possibilty of a union between UPA (DRC leftist group) and the MPLA, which would have threatened the profits of U.S. investors in Central Africa. Fitting a familiar pattern, Roberto's organization, FNLA, was unable to appeal to Angolans; when Roberto ran for president of Angola in 1992, he got only 2.1 percent of the vote. Ghanian writer Cameron Duodu said that Roberto was a traitor to African liberation.[213]

Middle East Policy: Minimizing Soviet Influence and Safeguarding Access to Oil

In a 1993 article in *The International Journal of Middle East Studies*, historian Douglas Little details through a review of declassified documents that the Kennedy administration continued Dwight Eisenhower's policy of viewing Israel as a key ally in the struggle to contain Soviet-backed revolutionary Arab nationalism. The Kennedy adminstration provided significant military hardware to Israel, including electronic surveillance equipment and Raytheon hawk missiles.[214] Kennedy also succombed to pressure by Israeli Foreign-Minister Golda Meir by burying a State Department and UN sanctioned plan for resettling 200,000 Palestinian refugees in Israel.[215]

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[210] Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy*, 245; Muehlenbeck, *Betting on Africans*. On the CIA's role in Nelson Mandela's arrest, see Jeremy Kuzmarov, "CIA Still Refuses to Declassify Documents Exposing Its Responsibility for the Betrayal, Arrest and 27-Year Imprisonment of Nelson Mandela," *CovertAction Magazine*, August 31, 2023, https://covertactionmagazine.com/2023/08/31/cia-still-refuses-to-declassify-documents-exposing-its-responsibility-for-the-betrayal-arrest-and-27-year-imprisonment-of-nelson-mandela/.

[211] Mahoney, *JFK*, ch. 8. Portugal was then ruled by fascist dictator Antonio Salazar.

[212] Williams, *White Malice,* 461; Mahoney, *JFK*, 204.

[213] Williams, *White Malice,* 461.

[214] Douglas Little, "The Making of a Special Relationship: The U.S. and Israel, 1957-1968," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 25, 4 (November 1993). For a period Kennedy tried to pry Israel's rival, Egypt, then led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, away from the Soviet Union with aid inducements, though sided with Saudi Arabia in its proxy war with Egypt in Yemen.

[215] Parmet, *JFK*, 228-234; Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy*, 246. The resettlement plan was authored by Dr. Joseph E. Johnson, the President of the Carnegie Endowment for Peace and history professor at Williams College and Bowdoin who was American chairman of the UN's Palestine Reconcililation Commission. The plan called for

Historian Warren Bass calls JFK "the father of the U.S. Israeli alliance," even if Lyndon B. Johnson was more supportive of Israel's nuclear program at Dimona.[216] Bass writes that "the Kennedy administration constitutes the pivotal presidency in U.S.-Israel relations, the hinge that swung decisively away from the chilly association of the 1950s and toward the full-blown alliance we know today. Kennedy was the first president to break the arms embargo blocking U.S. sale of major weaponry to Israel; after his term, Washington was deciding which arms to sell to the Jewish state, not *whether* to sell arms in the first place."[217]

In 1962, Kennedy privately told then Israeli Foreign minister Golda Meir "The United States has a special relationship with Israel in the Middle East, really comparable only to that which it has with Britain over a wide range of world affairs."[218] Opposing Eisenhower's institution of sanctions in an attempt to halt Israeli aggression during the 1956 Suez crisis, Kennedy had courted the Israeli lobby during the 1960 election.[219] In his 1960 campaign book, *A Strategy of Peace*, Kennedy promoted the Zionist myth that Palestine had been a barren desert and empty land before it was settled by the Jews, quoting Israel Zangwill who referenced Palestine as "a land without a people [that] waited for the people without a land [Jews]." Comparing Israel's success in making the desert bloom to Americans in the 19th century who brought civilization to the Great American plains, Kennedy wrote of Israel as a "bright light now shining in the Middle East" whose

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Arab acceptance of the state of Israel in exchange for the relocation of Arab Palestinians in Israel. Documents at the Kennedy Library in Boston, Massachusetts interestingly shows that Kennedy aides Robert W. Komer and Carl Kayson both urged Kennedy to implement of the Johnson plan but to no avail. In a memo to Kennedy dated December 5, 1962, Komer called the Johnson Plan "a carefully reasoned scheme evolved from the long time painful history of the particular attempts to deal with the refugee issue," and said that with Americna prestige at a high point in the Middle East, ciorcumstances had never "been more proptitious for the refugee initiative if only we could get the Israelis off the dime." Komer felt that the Johnson Plan was advantageous not only for the Palestinians but also for the Israelis about whom he wondered how long they "want to live in a semi-garrison state, surrounded by a million disonnected refugees" while "forced to divert a high proportion of its assets to security needs." Unfortunately, Komer said that the Israelis "feel there is only one way to achieve a [peaceful] settlement ie. to keep bloodying the Arabs every time they get mean," though Israel's "tough policy leads to repeated minor clashes which only serve to feed Arab hostility, not lessen it." Komer said he understood the domestic considerations that had constrained the president's hand (ie. the Israeli lobby, the "real reasons we are hesitant to push the Johnson Plan") and that the Israelis had mounted a pressure campaign that was almost impossible for the State Department to cope with. However, Komer felt that Kennedy had more room to maneuver after the mid-term elections. Komer furthermore told Kennedy that his administration had "done more to satisfy Israeli security preoccupations thany any of its predecessors"—promising Israel "hawk missiles, supporting it in its conflict over Jordanian waters, giving a higher level of economic aid [permiting extensive arms purchases], and giving various security assurances." As such, the U.S. government was in a better position than ever to pressure Israel into accepting a settlement that could defuse tensions in the region and enhance Israeli security. Komer warned that if this pressure was not applied and Israel continued to antagonize the Arabs, within a decade, [Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel] Nasser could acquire the resources he needs to risk a war, and the U.S. would "find itself giving a lot more than hawks to Israel to maintain a local deterrent balance." Robert W. Komer, Memorandum for The President, December 5, 1962, John F. Kennedy Library, Palestine: Refugees: General, December 1962-November 1963, https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/jfknsf-148a-003#?image_identifier=JFKNSF-148a-003-p0009

[216] Warren Bass, *Support Any Friend: Kennedy's Middle East and the Making of the U.S.-Israel Alliance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[217] Bass, *Support Any Friend*, 3.

[218] Yaacov Bar Simon Tov, "The United States and Israel Since 1948: A 'Special Relationship'?" *Diplomatic History*, 22, 2 (Spring 1998), 231.

[219] Bass, *Support Any Friend*, 52.

"nieghbors had much to learn" from "this center of democratic illumination, of unprecedented economic development, of human pioneering and intelligence and perseverance."[220]

Kennedy repeated a similar theme at the Zionists of America Convention at the Statler Hilton hotel in August 1960 in which he juxtaposed the neglect and ruin that he observed in Palestine when he first visited there in 1939—which he considered a legacy of Ottoman misrule—with the grandeur of Israel when he returned in 1951. Kennedy stated that "it was President Woodrow Wilson who forecast with prophetic wisdom the creation of a Jewish homeland. It was President Franklin Roosevelt who kept alive the hopes of Jewish redemption during the Nazi terror. It was President Harry Truman who first recognized the new State of Israel and gave it status in world affairs. And may I add that it would be my hope and my pledge to continue this Democratic tradition—and to be worthy of it." He added that "even while fighting for its own survival, Israel had given new hope to the persecuted, with "its…idealism and courage, its… sacrifice and generosity, …earn[ing] it the credentials of immortality."[221]

Robert Kennedy was also very pro-Israel, writing a series of articles in 1948 for the now defunct *Boston Post* in which he was critical of a temporary slippage of the American government's support for Jewish statehood, fearing that the U.S. was shifting towards Britain's negative policies and its aim "to crush" the Zionist cause. One of Kennedy's dispatches, which described his traveling with Haganah fighters in a convoy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, was headlined, "Jews Make Up for Lack of Arms with Undying Spirit, Unparalleled Courage." Making no mention at all of the Palestinian Nakba, or expulsion and massacre of tens of thousands of Palestinians at Israel's formation like his brother, Kennedy wrote. "It is already a truly great modern example of the birth of a nation with the primary ingredients of dignity and self-respect."[222]

Besides his support for Israel, the Kennedy administration increased financial aid and military support to the Shah of Iran who had been installed in a CIA coup, to Prince Faysal of Saudi Arabia, and to King Hussein of Jordan who threatened otherwise to draw closer to the Soviets. Historian April Summit wrote that American support for these and other traditional, autocratic Arab regimes vis a vis more progressives ones under Kennedy "branded the United States as an enemy of Pan-Arab nationalism."[223] This assessment contradicts the mythic view of Kennedy as an anti-imperialist who broke with traditional U.S. foreign policies. Summit wrote

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[220] Kennedy, *The Strategy of Peace*, 118.

[221] Speech by Senator John F. Kennedy, Zionists of America Convention, Statler Hilton Hotel, New York, New York, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/speech-senator-john-f-kennedy-zionists-america-convention-statler-hilton-hotel-new-york-ny. In *The Strategy of Peace*, Kennedy wrote that Israel's neighbors "have much to learn from thia center of democratic illumination, of unprecedented economic development, of human pioneering and intelligence and perseverance. In 1939, I first saw Palestine, then an unhappy land under alien rule, and to a large extent then a barren land."

[222] "Robert Kennedy's Reports From Palestine, 1948," Jerusalem Center For Public Affairs, June 5, 2008, https://jcpa.org/article/robert-kennedys-1948-reports-from-palestine/. Robert Kennedy scoffed at the suggestion that Israel might turn communist and wrote that America and Britain might soon "be looking to a Jewish state to preserve a toehold in that part of the world." Bass, *Support Any Friend*, 52.

[223] April R. Summit, "For a White Revolution: John F. Kennedy and the Shah of Iran," *Middle East Journal*, 58, 4 (Autumn 2004), 560-575.

that "Kennedy intended to work with whomever was necessary to further his aim: to minimize Soviet influence in the region and safeguard Western access to oil."[224]

In October 1962, Robert W. Komer, a senior staffer on the National Security Council and future Phoenix program director, drafted an internal defense plan calling for increased assistance to the Iranian Gendarmerie, national police and dreaded secret police SAVAK to "obviate the necessity to use military units to quell demonstrations or riots" that had broken out because of the impoversohment of the majority of the population under the Shah's rule (The Shah was a pawn of the U.S.-UK and Israel installed after the CIA's 1953 coup in Iran]. Komer in turn called for a "white revolution" of moderate land and other social reforms to counteract the "red revolution," which was consistent with the approach of the Kennedy administration in supporting incremental reforms from above in the aim of safeguarding U.S. strategic proxies and undercutting left-wing and procommunist movements capable of challenging American global power. In June 1963, after more demonstrations erupted in Tehran, the OPS provided an emergency shipment of tear gas, police batons and helmets to militarized riot control units. Dean Rusk's State Department expressed gratification to Police Colonel Absullah Vasiq for crushing the protests even though at least one major mullah had been killed.[225]

In Iraq, journalist Steve Coll wrote about the Kennedy adminstration's support for regime change. In February 1963, Iraq's Bathists led by a young Saddam Hussein overthrew and executed Abdel Karim Qassem, Iraq's ruler from 1958-1963 who had promoted a program of economic nationalism. The Baathists came to power "riding a CIA train," according to the new interior minister, and U.S. embassy in Baghdad had been in close contact with the Baathist conspirators at the time of their February coup. The Baath subsequently carried out pogroms against suspected communists using lists provided by U.S. intelligence.[226]

At the beginning of his presidency, Kennedy had pursued a promising opening with Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser, who had stood up to Israel and the Western powers when he nationalized the Suez canal in 1956 and formed the United Arab Republic (UAR) with Syria in an attempt to create a pan-Arab bloc that would be capable of resisting Western imperialism. When Egypt triggered a rebellion against monarchist forces in Yemen backed by Saudi Arabia, Kennedy sided with the Saudis, who promoted a vision of Pan-Islam to counter Nasser's secular Pan-Arabism. Historian James N. Giglio wrote that Kennedy's turn towards the conservative Arab camp was "probably driven by the enormous American oil investment in Saudi Arabia."[227]

In June 1963, Kennedy signed off on deploying eight F-100D fighters and a large command-and-control transport plane to Jidda with 861.3 tons of military equipment manned by

[224] Summit, "For a White Revolution," 563. Summit details that the Kennedy administration sold Saudi Arabia $17 million worth of arms, including 105mm and 155mm howitzers, assorted tanks, and eleven F-86 jets. The Kennedy administration also proposed to sell the Saudis the new F-5 A fighter planes and had a training mission posted at the Dhahran Airfield. April R. Summit, "Perspectives on Power: John F. Kennedy and U.S. Middle East Relations," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Western Michigan, 2003, 53, 165.
[225] Kuzmarov, *Modernizing Repression*, 198, 199.
[226] Steve Coll, *The Achilles Trap: Saddam Hussein, the CIA, and the Origins of America's Invasion of Iraq* (New York: Penguin Press, 2024), 55; Kuzmarov, *Modernizing Repression*, 201.
[227] Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy*, 247.

561 military personnel.[228] CIA agent Kermit Roosevelt, coordinator of the 1953 coup in Iran who became an executive with Gulf Oil, told the White House that U.S. interests and Nasser's at this time were "simply incompatible." The CIA backed an Israeli Mossad operation to train anti-Nasser guerrillas in the use of modern weapons and ran clandestine operations in support of pro-Saudi royalists. Former U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia Charles Freeman stated in 2004 that "Kennedy was screwing around with all sorts of covert operations and the Green Berets in Arabia."[229]

Seeking the Glory of a Next Augustan Age

The circumstances of Kennedy's assassination have clouded the judgment of normally skilled observers of American politics who have transformed Kennedy in death into something that he was not in life; something they want him to have been. Tellingly, when Kennedy visited the University of California a Berkeley in 1962, members of the campus peace organization SLATE scheduled a protest vigil and drafted a letter criticizing Kennedy for increasing military expenditures by $8 billion; organizing a military invasion against Cuba in violation of U.S. law and the United Nations charter, failing to take the initiative to repeal the McCarran Act[230] and to try and restore the rights of free expression to members of the Communist Party, and continuing to give active support to the corrupt dictatorships of Taiwan, South Vietnam, South Korea, Portugal, Spain and Nicaragua."[231]

Kennedy's imperialist ambitions were captured by poet Robert Frost at Kennedy's inauguration when he wrote of "the glory of a next Augustan age, of a power leading from its strength and pride. Of young ambition eager to be tried."[232] In many ways, Kennedy was among the most effective imperialists of all American presidents. His star power and oratory won hearts and minds and spread goodwill towards America even when it was subverting internal political structures and running ghastly counterinsurgency campaigns. Kennedy's lightfootprint approach and reliance on covert operations did not arouse the same backlash as World War II style military operations. Kennedy furthermore inspired a patriotic fervor and missionary zeal among Americans that made them true believers in the New Frontier/American Century, whose disastrous ramifications would eventually be recognized.

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[228] Bass, *Support Any Friend*, 130. The Pentagon was forced to make an embarassing concession that the military personnel would not be Jewish to satisfy the anti-semitic Saudi Royal family, which refused to issue visas to American Jews. The State Department considered the discrimination unecessary but declined to insist on the inclusion of Jewish servicemen. Robert Komer was such a huge driver of U.S. policy in the Middle East that Kennedy referred to Yemen as "Komer's war."

[229] Robert Dreyfuss, *Devil's Game: How the United States Helped Unleash Fundamentalist Islam* (New York: Henry Holt Company, 2005), 140-142.

[230] The McCarran Internal Security Act called for thr registration of Communist groups, tightened up espionage and subversive laws, and authorized internment of subversives in a time of war. Harry S. Truman called the bill a "terrible mistake" and "the greatest danger to free speech, press and assembly since the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798." Lasky, *JFK*, 232.

[231] Quoted in Peter Richardson, *A Bomb in Every Issue: How the Short Unruly Life of Ramparts Magazine Changed America* (New York: the New Press, 2009), 12, 13. SLATE also criticized Kennedy's tepid support for the civil rights movement.

[232] Quoted in Maga, *John F. Kennedy and the New Pacific Community, 1961-1963*, 113.