

The Kennedy Administration and the Bloody 1963 Coup in Vietnam

Liang-tsai Wei

Abstract

As far as the United States and the Vietnamese people are concerned, the Vietnam War was undoubtedly one of the most tragic events in this century. The War had significant and lasting impacts on American politics, military service, diplomacy, economy and society.

The bloody coup that overthrew Ngo Dinh Diem in early November 1963 contributed significantly to the United States' later deepening involvement in the War, and the Kennedy Administration played an active and direct role in the coup. This paper intends to trace the emergence of Diem and his relations with American leaders, the difficult domestic problems challenging the Diem regime, and the causes and effects of the bloody coup.

This paper concludes that both Kennedy and Diem share unequivocal responsibility for the coup. Kennedy's responsibility lay in the fact that although he did not instigate the coup, he failed to prevent his subordinates from participating. Diem's fatal weakness was his unwillingness to initiate some necessary reforms, which eventually led to his downfall and violent death.

Key Words: Kennedy Administration, Ngo Dinh Diem, Madame Nhu, buddhist demonstrations, bloody military coup