



# **On the Road to Despair**

# How is JFK Different?

- Views conflict more as civil war
  - Build S. VIE into a nation so it could defeat N. VIE w/out risking US lives
- Understood guerrilla warfare was “wave of the future”, and thought US military buildup would stop it, ending the Cold War

Those who make  
peaceful revolution  
impossible, make  
violent revolution  
inevitable.

John F. Kennedy

b&p

# Poor Laos

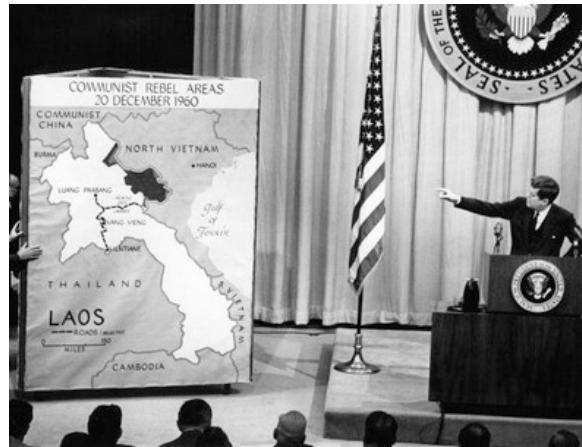
- Peaceful people who want to be left alone
- Geneva est. DMZ around 17<sup>th</sup> Parallel
  - If N.VIE tried to cross, they'd be easily defeated & US/SEATO would enter war
- 1961 – Bay of Pigs disaster makes JFK shy about intervening in Laos
- 1962 – US Marines to THI → Negotiations end → All US & Thai advisor left, as did 40 of 6K N. VIE
  - Clear route to S. VIE → Ho Chi Minh Trail



# Kissinger ❤️s Laos

- Laos the only place US could have fought conventional war & won (647)
  - Hated foreigners → no native soil for N. VIE
  - Thai troops would have helped maintain neutrality
- So, why not? (Kissinger admits it wasn't his view)
  - Too strategic for ideological problem
  - Didn't fit into Domino Theory → disrupts consensus
- JFK decides he must defend S. VIE
  - CMB prince allows communist base camps → Catch-22
  - KISS: Nobody saw the quagmire coming (648)

That there is Laos.  
It's a country where  
people live. – JFK



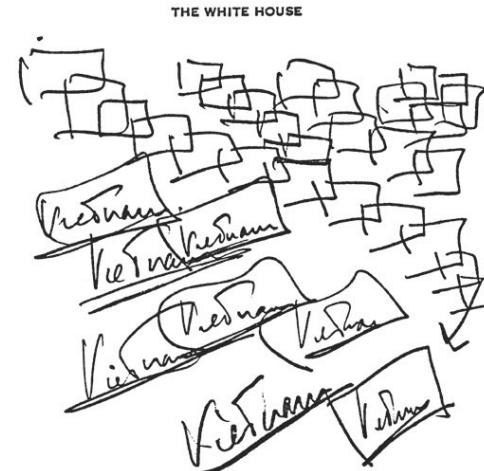
# “Nation Building”

- JFK makes several arguments encouraging self-defense for S. VIE (648-49)
- May 1961 – VP **LBJ** to S. VIE to “assess” situation
  - 5/11 – NSC strategy (650)
  - Next 3mos: Slightly distracted by Berlin Crisis
- Fall ’61 – **Taylor & Rostow** go to S. VIE
  - 8000 member “military logistic force” to help with flooding...but could also defend themselves
- **Bundy & McNamara** – 40K-205K soldiers would be needed to “arrest” situation in Vietnam



# Caught Somewhere in the Middle

- **KISS**: Choice was full commitment or withdrawal; gradual buildup was worst choice; Could not have found a more intractable adversary (652)
  - JFK continues to escalate troops w/o positive results
    - Increase in military deaths (653)
    - Washington trapped in the philosophy where political reform would = military victory (653)
    - Diem frozen by fanatical ideologues in Hanoi & inexperienced idealists in DC



# Fall of Diem

- DC & Saigon butt heads on nearly everything
  - Conditional aid (654)
- May '63 – Diem fires on Buddhist monks →
  - June – Monk self immolates in Saigon
  - August – Diem's brother Nhu arrests 1400 monks
- September – Amb. Henry Cabot Lodge tells S. VIE they won't get aid if they don't remove Nhu/Diem
- 11/1/63 – Diem & Nhu overthrown & killed



# Aftermath

- Generals involved in plot compete for power → 7 new governments in '64 alone
  - Had no choice but to turn war over to Americans
- 11/23/63 – JFK assassinated → LBJ president



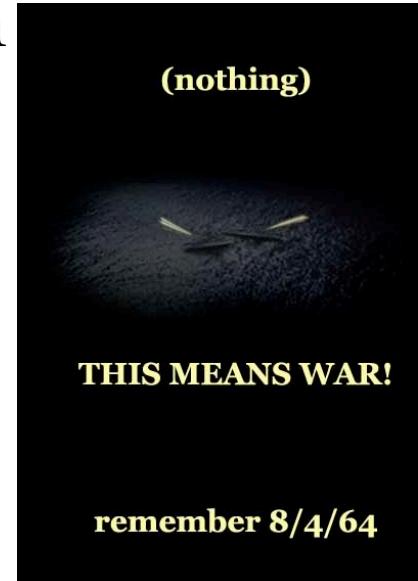
# Hey, Hey LBJ...

- Didn't want to abandon war @ any cost (656)
  - Some argue JFK would have withdrawn post-'64 election
  - Couldn't go against JFK, whatever his intentions (657)



# Gulf of Tonkin “Incident” (658)

- August '64 – Presumed attack on *Maddox* → **Gulf of Tonkin Resolution** → justifies retaliatory airstrikes
  - Johnson “may not have been entirely candid”
  - **KISS**: Doesn’t matter. Would’ve happened anyway (659)
- **Operation Rolling Thunder** – Attack on Americans in Pleiku → Bombing campaign in North Vietnam
- By 1969 – 500K+ US troops in Vietnam



# Big Problems

- KISS: Didn't learn right lessons from Korea→ doomed to repeat them (659)
- There are two solutions for fighting a guerrilla war, but, US chose option C, which was bad (660)
- US didn't listen to CHN. Again. (661)
- LBJ preached moderation→ only prolonged fighting



# San Antonio Formula (1967)

- Kissinger learned Hanoi would negotiate if US stopped bombing N. VIE
- Johnson's every instinct rebelled against a halt in bombing → But...
- US willing to stop bombing provided VC don't take advantage of it (664)
  - KISS: Decisive turning point. Hanoi realizes it has the upper hand (665)



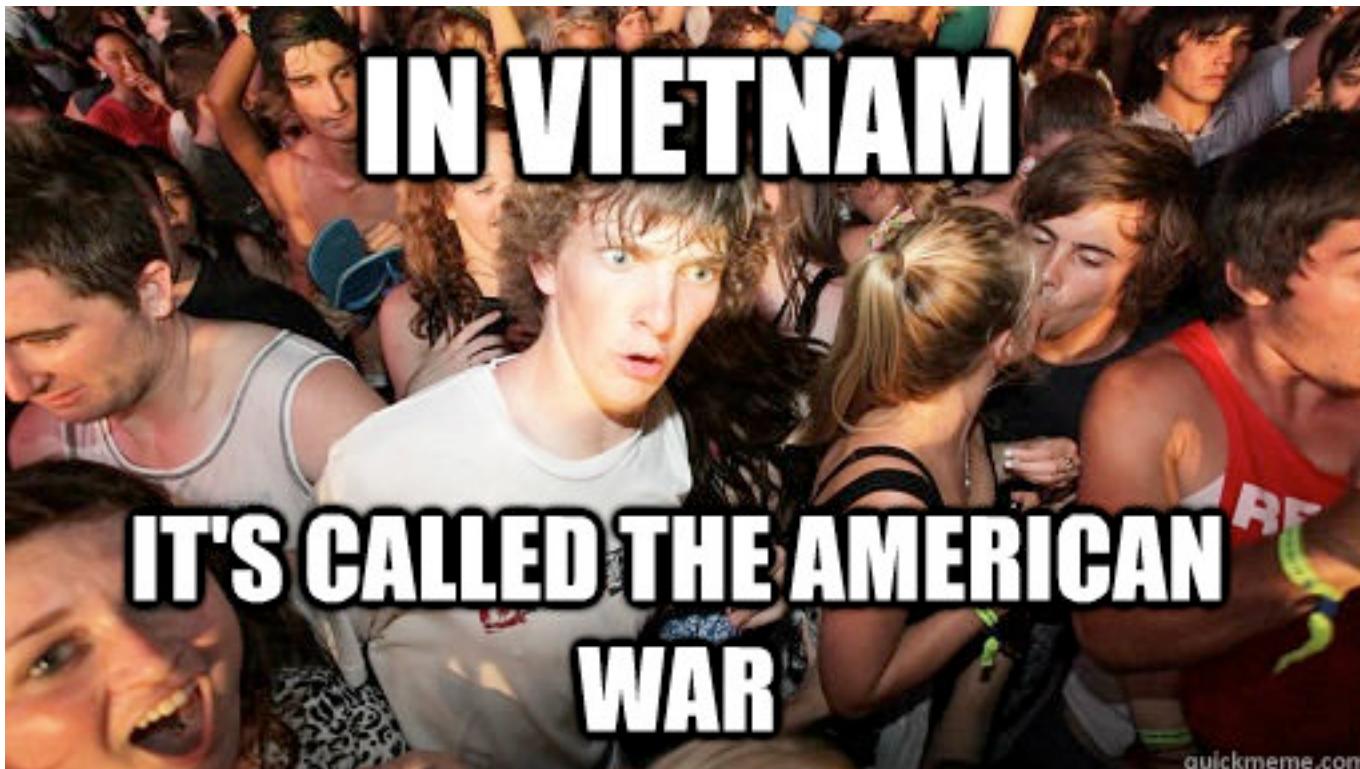
# Critiques of US Foreign Policy!?

- Lippmann (665-666)
- Fulbright (666-67)
- Unwinnable, CBA?, Overextension? (666)
- Moral criticism for first time → Not good (667)
- Containment ridiculed (667); Renfield
- Worthiness of America? (668)



# What Do We Do Now?

- Neither compromise, nor victory would yield desirable results → would have to give up too much b/c Hanoi wouldn't give in (669)
  - Not victory & compromise, but victory & defeat (670)



# Tet Offensive

- January '68 – Truce during lunar new year → violated by VC w/ large offensive against 30 S.VIE capitals; Hue fell to VC
- Militarily, huge VC failure; guerrillas all but gone
- Psychological victory for Hanoi
  - Wonder whether US going all-out would have produced negotiations & ceasefire (671)
  - Instead, “Wise Men” end escalation & begin liquidation



# Fall of Johnson

- Under extraordinary pressure from media, student demonstrators, and Congress, Johnson buckles & halts bombing on 3/31/1968
- Declared he would not run for re-election
  - Sent 500K troops to SE Asia, leave extrication, terrible negotiating position, hostile Hanoi to successor

