

# worldview

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## VIETNAM TODAY—AND TOMORROW

The oppressive nine-year rule of President Ngo Dinh Diem has come to a violent end. The task facing the new regime is essentially the task that Diem—brave, resolute, intelligent and dedicated as he was—was unable to cope with. If South Vietnam is not to fall under Communist domination the government must continue to move against the Communist guerrillas in the countryside, even more effectively than it has in the past. But it must also restore to the Vietnamese people elements of social justice of which they have been deprived and for which they have been clamoring. These two objectives, distinct as they are, are intimately related in South Vietnam today and must be pursued concurrently if the present regime is to mark an advance on that of Diem.

Now that Diem has been overthrown, (with minimal regret on the part of the country that supported him for years) and precipitately slain, it may be well to assess that peculiar combination of qualities that caused him to fall from heights which he had with such difficulty attained.

Diem became leader of South Vietnam as a revolutionary in a time of revolution. In the early years of his regime he surprised many people by his success in resisting external pressures from Communists and French colonialists and by his success in suppressing dangerous elements within his country. He seemed to have a clear vision of goals proper to his country and the vigor and determination to attain those goals. His service to his country in those uncertain early years should not be forgotten or slighted.

But, tragically, the strains, complications and misunderstanding that gathered around his regime like a miasma gradually dimmed his vision and misdirected his fierce determination. The distance between the Diem regime and the Vietnamese people grew ever greater and an insistence that the Diem way was the right way turned resoluteness into rigidity. The part the

U.S. government played in this gradual transformation is far from clear, and will remain unclear until more facts are in, but it seems evident that it introduced further confusions into an already confused and complicated situation. And since none of the elements in the situation could be readily changed there was an air of inevitability to the way in which they worked themselves out to their unhappy conclusion.

If the end of the Diem regime, the destruction of such a remarkable person, is necessarily sad, the new regime comes in on a note of hope and optimism for the first time in years. Its first announcement makes clear that it realizes and acknowledges the twin, or at least entwined, objectives it now faces. The Council of Revolutionary People and Army announced a six-point program that emphasized continued opposition to the Communists and the granting of political and religious freedoms. As an earnest of this pledge, many political prisoners, students and Buddhists were almost immediately released from prison.

One great factor that remains uncertain is the makeup of the new regime. The coup was engineered by a military junta but some voices already call for more civilian participation in the new regime. And some of these voices emanate from Washington. But since the United States' disclaimer of responsibility for the coup has encountered noticeable scepticism, it must act with more circumspection than it has sometimes shown in the past. This does not mean that it must yield up the vast leverage that it undeniably has. What it should mean is that the leverage be used with discretion, restraint and—possibly most important—with consistency. The only alternative to a policy marked by such characteristics is withdrawal of United States resources from Southeast Asia, a course which has not yet been persuasively presented.