

## **Kennedy, Dulles, Viet Nam, and Nixon**

# Background on Indochina and Viet Nam

- Colonial past started in 1850 as a French colony (opium, salt, rubber, zinc, copper)
  - Periodic attempts at revolt
- Indochina (especially Indonesia) was of significant interest to Rockefeller faction in Roosevelt administration and was factor in Pacific war
- Rapid defeat of France by Germany in 1940 destabilized the situation
  - Germans generally left the French in place during the war
- Japan took control in 1944
  - FDR establishes OSS mission to work against Japanese rule
  - OSS works with Vietnamese resistance leader Ho Chi Mien and his followers Viet Minh
- Post war plan was for the Nationalist Chinese to occupy the North and the British the south as temporary trustees
  - England betrayed trustee relationship causing revolt of Viet Minh which was put down
  - The French then return but no negotiations for independence ensued
  - War broke out and France assaulted Hanoi in 1946 and attempted to establish puppet government
- FDR's death brings about drastic turn in US post war policy
  - Wanted to disband colonialism to avoid future “wars of liberation” (FDR / Sec Hull)
- China and Russia recognize Ho Chi Mien's government in 1950
- US then begins active support of the French and Bao Dai government in the South
  - Policy driven by Acheson and became policy for Truman and then Eisenhower

# The US Becomes Actively Involved

- The French are defeated in 1954 as Dien Bien Phu falls
  - Operation Vulture to rescue French garrison is stopped by Eisenhower
- US blocks unification and seeks a partition during peace conference
  - “Domino” argument is made but even Dulles brother doesn’t believe it
  - Seek to oppose China becoming dominant regional power in the Southeast Asia
  - Block vote on unification
- China allows Viet Nam to be partitioned to avoid another Korean style war
- US controlled and backed administration is installed in the South
  - Election is held where US backed Diem got more votes than voters
- Walt Rostow became central character in advancing US involvement in Viet Nam
  - Democrat, Center of International Studies at MIT
- USA becomes increasingly involved in Southeast Asia under Eisenhower
  - Money and military advisors
  - Foreign aid became primary tool to direct and influence foreign states
- This set the stage for what JFK would inherit along with fundamental conflict with the military and other pseudo government actors

# Graphical Comparison of FDR / Hull foreign policy vs that of the Vital Center, New Right and then Neoconservatives

	Russia	Mao's China	Nazi Germany	Post War East Germany	Post War West Germany	Britain	Viet Nam / SE Asia
Roosevelt and Hull (Pre 1945)	Partner and ally	Neutral, N/A	Enemy State	N/A	N/A	Economic Adversary	Neutral
Wise men (Acheson, Keenan) (1935 – 50)	Economic Adversary	Regional Adversary	Investment zone prior to 1942	Enemy State	Ally	Ally	Economic Area of Interest
Vital Center (1945 – 1955)	Enemy State	Enemy State	N/A	Enemy State	Ally	Ally	Economic Area of Interest
New Right (1955 – 1970)	Existential Threat	Existential Threat	N/A	Existential Threat	Satellite State	Ally	Conflict Region
Neoconservatives (1970 - )	Existential Threat	Existential Threat	N/A	Existential Threat	Satellite State	Core Ally	Conflict Region

# John F Kennedy

- JFK's presidency marks a critical point in American history
  - became a symbol to the New Left, which was to rise shortly following his passing
  - also seen very positively by many on the Libertarian Right based on, what would appear to be, his growing opposition to Cold War policies and possible opposition to the Federal Reserve Board system
- Kennedy is generally seen as a Cold Warrior who started to change and favor détente during the course of his presidency
  - Kennedy, who was a Catholic, is portrayed by some as having had a spiritual rebirth leading him to turn away from US Cold War policy that came very close to bringing about a nuclear war
  - He was the son of Joe Kennedy who was an ardent isolationist
- Prior to becoming president, expressed reservations about the expanding US role in Southeast Asia along with imperialist expansion in Africa
- Kennedy didn't necessarily see war and peace as a strictly a political issue
  - Speaking of his war experience in the Pacific he said *"Admittedly world organization with common obedience to law would be solution. Not that easy. If there is not the feeling that war is the ultimate evil, a feeling strong enough to drive them together, then you can't work out this internationalist plan (Schlesinger 1965, 88). Things cannot be forced from the top."*

# JFK Family Background and 1960 Election

- John Kennedy was the second son and became the center of his family's political ambition after Joe Jr. was killed in WWII
  - Father Joe was Ambassador to England, ardent abolitionist, and part of the "Old Right"
- Won the presidency in a very close election in 1960 against Vice President Nixon
  - May have been won on election fraud in Illinois and Texas although Nixon chose not to challenge the results
- Kennedy had established himself as a Cold Warrior in 1958 when, in a major speech, he accused the Eisenhower administration of allowing a missile gap to open up with the supposedly superior Soviet forces
  - repeated this during the 1960 campaign arguing for increased military spending.
  - His science advisor Jerome Wiesner informed Kennedy in February 1961 that "*the missile gap was fiction*", which drew a response of anger as opposed to relief
  - The United States actually held an overwhelming strategic advantage and Kennedy had bought into the Cold War myth
  - Kennedy also enlarged the Army's Special Forces, renaming them the Green Berets to carry out counter insurgency warfare operations

# Bay of Pigs

- Covert project initiated under the Eisenhower administration
  - Training of the exile troops in Guatemala had already begun by the late summer of 1960
  - Kennedy eventually rejected the Trinidad Plan that called for an amphibious and airborne assault favoring a night landing without direct US military intervention
  - Kennedy emphasized that he wouldn't authorize direct the introduction of US ground troops even if the exile army faced defeat
  - CIA's covert-action chief, Richard Bissell agreed to this
- Invasion was launched on April 15, 8 B-26 bombers carried out strikes against the Cuban Air Force that were only partially successful
  - Security Adviser, McGeorge Bundy, told CIA deputy director General Charles P. Cabell that further strikes would not be initiated until a beachhead was established
  - Because this never happened, this decision effectively cancelled the airstrikes
- The exile brigade was surrounded and surrendered on April 19
- The military and the CIA were extremely disappointed at Kennedy's decision to accept defeat and the president came to see this as a sort of trap or setup to force him to escalate the conflict

# Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962

- Khrushchev *“we were quite certain that the [Bay of Pigs] invasion was only the beginning and that the Americans would not let Cuba alone”*
  - This led to the idea of installing nuclear weapons in Cuba and hiding them from the US until it was too late to do anything about it
  - showed a general lack of understanding of the American Cold War mindset that was nearly to prove catastrophic
- As the US became aware of construction in Cuba, the pressures on President Kennedy for a preemptive U.S. strike was intense
  - Kennedy was consistently almost alone in resisting war and maintaining his policy of a blockade. After refusing to authorize a massive air strike on October 19, 1962
  - Air Force Chief of Staff General Curtis LeMay, challenged the president saying *“This [blockade and political action] is almost as bad as the appeasement at Munich. . .*
  - On Wednesday, October 24, a Soviet submarine was about to be intercepted by U.S. helicopters with depth charges
- Kennedy felt that he had lost all control of the situation and that nuclear war was imminent
  - Then Khrushchev ordered the Soviet ships to stop dead in the water rather than challenge the U.S. quarantine.
  - The standard interpretation of this event is simply that Khrushchev *“blinked”* yet there was much more going on in the background



# The Khrushchev Letters

- There were twenty-one secret confidential letters between Kennedy and Khrushchev from 1961 to 63
  - Some of these were debates that didn't really resolve anything but they did establish a path of direct communication that was direct and went around formal channels
  - On Friday night, October 26, Kennedy received a letter from Khrushchev where he offered to withdraw his missiles
  - In exchange, Kennedy would pledge not to invade Cuba which created some hope
  - However, the next morning, Kennedy received a second letter from Khrushchev adding to the terms
  - He demanded a U.S. commitment to remove missiles from Turkey and Russia would promise not to invade Turkey
  - JFK sent a message via Robert Kennedy to Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin to pass to Khrushchev offering to remove the missiles from Turkey but said it couldn't be done immediately
  - Khrushchev accepted and this defused the situation. Kennedy's promise was fulfilled six months later
- So how close did the world come to a nuclear war?
  - From the perspective of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, close but maybe not close enough thinking they would not meet with much of a reprisal
  - unbeknownst to the US, Soviet forces in Cuba had possessed a total of 162 nuclear warheads that were operational and had been prepared to launch on October 26, the day the U2 had been shot down over Cuba

# Kennedy vs. the CIA

- From this point forward Kennedy gave all indications we wanted to deescalate and potentially end the Cold War
  - graduation speech he gave at the American University in Washington on June 10
  - [“Peace Speech”](#)
  - This put him directly at odds with the “*military industrial complex*”
- Allen Dulles who was fired by Kennedy as the head of the CIA after the Bay of Pigs
- Kennedy was believed to have been pulling away from the Vietnam conflict
- [Kennedy and the Secret Society Speech](#)
- Kennedy and the Federal Reserve
  - Addressed in part in the secret society speech
  - Can be interpreted different way
  - But he was toying with the idea of the Government controlling the money

# Lee Harvey Oswald

- Oswald joined the Marines in 1956 after dropping out of high school where he developed some unusual skills
  - September 1957 to November 1958 - radar operator at Atsugi Air Force Base in Japan which served as the CIA's main operational base in the Far East and one of two bases that the U-2 flew from
  - had a “*crypto*” clearance, which is higher than top secret
  - reassigned as a radar operator to Marine Air Control Squadron No. 9 in Santa Ana, California
  - released from his marine commitment on September 11, 1959 on a hardship plea
  - A couple months later Oswald presented himself at the American University in Moscow with the stated intent of renouncing his US citizenship
- This would have been a major leak or espionage incident
  - US government couldn't have passively handed him over as a professed traitor
- After a year of living in Minsk, Oswald returns to the US embassy in Moscow and is welcomed back
  - As opposed to being arrested and prosecuted, he is given a loan and returned to the states
  - From there strange and expatriated movements across international boundaries continued
- Was possibly involved in secret program to implant agents in USSR
  - *One of these activities was an ONI [Office of Naval Intelligence] program which involved three dozen, maybe forty, young men who were made to appear disenchanted, poor American youths who had become turned off and wanted to see what communism was all about*

# Johnson and Nixon

- Johnson was elected in a landslide over Goldwater in '64 with over 60% of the popular vote – created two year democratic super majority
  - Great Society legislation passes including Medicare, Civil Rights Act, etc..
  - Created demographic time bomb and over stimulated medical demand initialing rapid cost rise
  - Civil Rights and environmental legislation generally vague and implemented through the courts
  - Did little to improve the condition of anybody and actively sought to break ethic communities
  - Viet Nam war expands and demonstrations spread across college campuses
- Republicans have their own landslide in '66
  - But never attempt to undue anything that had been done – increased incarcerations
- Nixon easily defeats Humphrey in '68 after Johnson withdraws
  - George Wallace runs third party candidacy and get about 13% of the popular vote
  - Eventually ends Viet Nam war and South Viet Nam falls later in '74
  - Opens relations with China and deescalates with Russia
  - Consistently high inflation (partially wage driven)
  - Takes US off of gold standard
- Watergate
  - Minor event in the course of '72 campaign that Nixon had no foreknowledge of
  - Nixon surrounded by “CIA type” staff people who tended to act autonomously
  - All but one of the people that committed break-in were CIA connected
  - Star “young reporter” Bob Woodward with the Washington Post was career Navy man who go out after eight years (very unusual) who had worked primarily with intelligence agencies