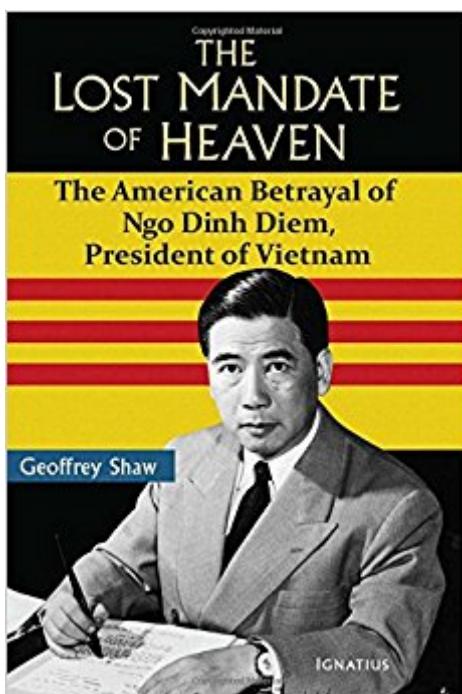


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# The Lost Mandate Of Heaven: The American Betrayal Of Ngo Dinh Diem, President Of Vietnam



## Synopsis

Ngo Dinh Diem, the first president of the Republic of Vietnam, possessed the Confucian "Mandate of Heaven", a moral and political authority that was widely recognized by all Vietnamese. This devout Roman Catholic leader never lost this mandate in the eyes of his people; rather, he was taken down by a military coup sponsored by the U.S. government, which resulted in his brutal murder. The commonly held view runs contrary to the above assertion by military historian Geoffrey Shaw. According to many American historians, President Diem was a corrupt leader whose tyrannical actions lost him the loyalty of his people and the possibility of a military victory over the North Vietnamese. The Kennedy Administration, they argue, had to withdraw its support of Diem. Based on his research of original sources, including declassified documents of the U.S. government, Shaw chronicles the Kennedy administration's betrayal of this ally, which proved to be not only a moral failure but also a political disaster that led America into a protracted and costly war. Along the way, Shaw reveals a President Diem very different from the despot portrayed by the press during its coverage of Vietnam. From eyewitness accounts of military, intelligence, and diplomatic sources, Shaw draws the portrait of a man with rare integrity, a patriot who strove to free his country from Western colonialism while protecting it from Communism. "A candid account of the killing of Ngo Dinh Diem, the reasons for it, who was responsible, why it happened, and the disastrous results. Particularly agonizing for Americans who read this clearly stated and tightly argued book is the fact that the final Vietnam defeat was not really on battle grounds, but on political and moral grounds. The Vietnam War need not have been lost. Overwhelming evidence supports it." "From the Foreword by James V. Schall, S.J., Professor Emeritus, Georgetown University "Did I find a veritable Conradian 'Heart of Darkness'? Yes, I did, but it was not in the quarter to which all popular American sources were pointing their accusatory fingers; in other words, not in Saigon but, paradoxically, within the Department of State back in Washington, D.C., and within President Kennedy's closest White House advisory circle. The actions of these men led to Diem's murder. And with his death, nine and a half years of careful work and partnership between the United States and South Vietnam was undone." "Geoffrey Shaw, from the Preface "This masterpiece will likely emerge as the definitive work on this troublesome subject. An exceedingly well-written and engaging read, replete with significant revelations and exposés." "William L. Stearman, Ph.D., Director of the National Security Council's Indochina staff, 1973-1976 "A remarkable book that finally sets the record straight with copious documentation on the assassination of Diem, which was ultimately responsible for our loss of the war. A must read." "Admiral John M. Poindexter, U.S. Navy (ret.), National Security Advisor to President Reagan "Shaw has produced a truly

monumental and highly readable account. Any serious student of the Vietnam War must read this book." Colonel Andrew R. Finlayson, U.S. Marine Corps (ret.), Author, *Killer Kane* "It took half a century for someone committed and brave enough to unravel the Machiavellian plot to assassinate President Diem." Nghia M. Vo, Director of Saigon Arts, Culture, and Education Institute (SACEI)

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Amidst a new time of national strategic misdirection and hubris, the case of Diem demands to be revisited. This book is essential reading."-- Thomas A. Marks, Ph.D., Author, *Maoist People's War in Post-Vietnam Asia* "Geoffrey Shaw has done a commendable job in unraveling the intricacies of the most wrong-headed political decisions of the Vietnam War." --Stephen Sherman, Editor, *Vietnam Veterans for Factual History, Indochina Series*"In this important book, Geoffrey Shaw illuminates the critical conflicts within the U.S. government over support for South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem prior to his assassination." --Mark Moyar, Author, *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954 1965*"Utilizing newly released documents, Professor Shaw, in his riveting book, reveals how the anti-Catholic crowd in the U.S. State Department manipulated President Kennedy to authorize the removal of South Vietnam's first president, Ngo Dinh Diem." --George J. Marlin, Author, *Christian Persecutions in the Middle East: A 21st Century Tragedy*

Geoffrey Shaw, Ph.D., received his doctorate in history from the University of Manitoba, with a focus on US diplomatic and military history in Southeast Asia. From 1994 to 2008 he was an Assistant Professor of History for the American Military University. He has written and spoken widely about

US military involvement in Vietnam and the Middle East. Currently he is the President of the Alexandrian Defense Group, a think tank on counterinsurgency warfare.

This book is a well-written, engaging and disturbing account of the events leading up to the assassination of Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother by members of a military junta supported by the United States government. This book is a real page-turner. The pace of the narrative will keep your attention like a best selling political thriller. It is a gut-wrenching read because the reader knows how the story will end. Of all of the post WWII-foreign adventures undertaken by the United States, there is probably none so duplicitous, despicable or egregious as the abandonment of Ngo Dinh Diem. There is absolutely no historical dispute that the United States government, apart from what is described in this book, once Diem's most reliable supporter, changed its mind and decided on regime change (does this sound familiar?), and commenced to support and engineer a military coup (again, does this sound familiar?), resulting in the deaths of Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu. The United States government, almost from day one, attempted to distance itself of responsibility for the murders, maintaining that the killings were unauthorized and the unintended actions of overzealous members of the coup. At best this is a distortion of the truth. If there is one thing this book makes clear, if there is one theme consistent in this sad story, it is that elements of President Kennedy's senior staff and advisors, instrumental elements of the ruling elite in Washington, and the general public, swayed after reading report after report from the new media (principally, the New York Times and specifically, David Halberstam) falsely creating the impression that Diem was a corrupt, ineffectual dictator (a tactic effectively used years later against Noriega in Nicaragua and Hussein in Iraq), wanted Diem OUT, and if he got murdered in the process "oh, well, .... It is all documented in foreboding detail in this history. (By the way, all the events in this book are fully and unobtrusively footnoted, with references.) Diem always had supporters, even to the end, in government. Dean Rusk, Kennedy's Secretary of State, was one supporter. This book, surprisingly, states that even William Colby, the CIA spymaster and station chief in Saigon at the time, was another one of Diem's biggest supporters. However, Diem had dangerous enemies in John Kenneth Galbraith and Averell Harriman, whose active dislike of Diem carried the day. The book doesn't explain why these individuals disliked Diem so much. Harriman for one didn't think Diem was right because he was unable to lead Vietnam to a democracy. The author maintains that Harriman's ill will was based on policy differences about Laos. I would hate to think, although this may be implied in the subtext of the book, that Diem's strong Catholic faith may have played a role in the eyes of the elites who were advising

Kennedy. The repercussions of this about-face were disastrous. For whatever his faults, the book documents that Diem's military efforts had made gains against Communist insurgents in the countryside. These military gains were reversed in a big way once Diem was out of the way. All semblance of stability in South Vietnam evaporated, and with President Johnson elected a year following his assassination, ... well, the rest is history. The only downside of the book is that it occasionally sinks into a sort of hagiography. As detestable as the US government's conduct was, the book alludes to, but fails to fully describe, the autocratic side of Diem. He had prohibited political parties and dissent, closed opposition newspapers, and failed to conduct regional elections in 1956, although he had been required to do so by the Geneva Convention in 1954. Far more space is devoted to his positive achievements, his victimization and demonization by the US government and others, his revered status in the eyes of ordinary Vietnamese citizens " even to this day " and what he wanted to accomplish, but was prevented to do by US governmental agencies, than to his dark side. As a result a less balanced portrait of his character is presented. All too often the events in this book are presented as "The US Government" verses Diem. Still, there is undisputedly a kernel of truth to this characterization. The Ngo Dinh Diem story thus is a petrie dish of how not to conduct American foreign policy. Still, sadly, this type of scenario gets played over again and again and again. If anything can be taken from this book it is that there are hazards to regime change and unintended consequences from meddling in the affairs of foreign governments. This message was played out some three weeks later when President Kennedy himself was the victim of a political assassination.

As a veteran of the Vietnam War who spent 32 months in that war-torn country as a combat Marine, I found Dr. Shaw's book both profound and refreshing. I say this because when I went to Vietnam I was influenced by what I read in the national press, especially the New York Times, about President Diem. I was lead to believe that he was an Asian mandarin, a religious zealot, a Roman Catholic who oppressed the Buddhist majority in his country, and a puppet of the US who had to be removed from office if democracy and freedom would prevail. However, in Vietnam I came to a very different conclusion, based upon my interviews with dozens of enemy POWs and political cadres, and my Vietnamese friends who were Buddhists. I found that President Diem was respected by the communists and loved by the Buddhists. One southern communist political leader I interviewed even told me that he thought the greatest gift the Americans had given to the Viet Cong was the murder of President Diem since he "was a true Vietnamese nationalist who was loved and respected by people in both North and South Vietnam." Several Buddhists told me that they

supported President Diem because he had built many new Buddhist temples and repaired even more that had been neglected during the French colonial period. These comments and others made by my Vietnamese colleagues and friends led me to change my mind about President Diem and see him as a national leader who truly enjoyed the respect and love of his countrymen. This well-researched and brilliantly written book lays bare the many myths and falsehoods concerning President Diem and clearly explains why the American government sought to remove him from power. It identifies the culprits behind this perfidy and their motivations for promoting the coup that led to President Diem's murder in 1963. It also dramatically details the negative fallout from this coup, which effectively removed the one hope South Vietnam had for unifying the country behind an effective leader in the fight against the North Vietnamese. I highly recommend this book to anyone who is interested in the truth about this little understood and often maligned Vietnamese nationalist and how his removal by the Americans led to a decade of war that ended with the defeat of American objectives in SE Asia and the enslavement of the people of Vietnam.

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