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Joseph G. Morgan. *The Vietnam Lobby: The American Friends of Vietnam, 1955-1975*. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1997. xviii + 229 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-2322-4.

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After the end of the First Indochina War in 1954, Vietnam was split into a Communist North and an anti-Communist South. Ngo Dinh Diem's government had American support as it struggled to consolidate its authority in the South, but in the spring of 1955, its odds seemed so poor that the United States was seriously thinking of giving up on Diem and looking for other options. The situation soon improved, but the American commitment to Diem still did not seem ironclad. The "American Friends of Vietnam" (AFV), dedicated to encouraging and strengthening that commitment, was formed at the end of 1955. It was never a large or a really influential group, but its story, recounted in Joseph Morgan's new book *The Vietnam Lobby*, makes a fascinating vignette of Cold War history. It is a revised version of Morgan's doctoral dissertation (Georgetown University, History, 1993).

The AFV did not aspire to a mass membership. It recruited people of influence, and liked to get people with strong government connections when it could. Members of both houses of Congress, and one Supreme Court justice, joined in the 1950s. General John W. "Iron Mike" O'Daniel was chairman of the AFV until 1963. General William J. Donovan (head of the OSS during World War II) was honorary chairman until 1957. The organization then got along without an honorary chairman for several years, but in about 1966 Henry Cabot Lodge (US Ambassador to Saigon and a power in the Republican Party—he had been Richard Nixon's running mate in the 1960 presidential election) and General Maxwell Taylor (former US Ambassador to Saigon and former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) jointly became honorary chairmen; they served well into the 1970s.

The members also included at various times scholars like Wesley Fishel, I. Milton Sacks, Robert Scalapino, George Tanham, and Frank Trager; journalists like Robert Shaplen; and businessmen, of whom the ones who played the largest role were probably Harold L. Oram, whose public relations firm represented Diem's government in the United States from 1955 to 1961, and William F. Ward, a Wall Street executive who was chairman from 1968 to 1974.

The AFV initially included anti-Communists from across the American political spectrum, not just conservatives but liberals like Senators John F. Kennedy and Mike Mansfield, and even Norman Thomas, head of the American Socialist Party. Joseph Buttinger, an Austrian immigrant who still held some of the socialist views of his youth, and who went to South Vietnam in 1954 to aid refugees from North Vietnam, had more than anyone else been the founder of the organization. By the mid to late 1960s the socialists and liberals had mostly dropped out, and the AFV shifted to the Right.

Joseph Morgan, a member of the Congregation of Christian Brothers and an assistant professor of history at Iona College, has done a great deal of work, both interviewing participants and tracking down records and letters in various libraries and archives, all well documented; there are 31 pages of endnotes to the 160 pages of the text of the book. Indeed, the research Morgan did could and should have supported a somewhat longer book.

Morgan argues, convincingly, that the American Friends of Vietnam did not have the impact on U.S. policy that some authors have ascribed to it. Its founders wanted to ensure that the Eisenhower administration

made a firm commitment to Ngo Dinh Diem, but by the time the AFV actually got organized, the commitment had already been made.

The AFV might have had the opportunity to influence major decisions during the administration of John Kennedy, but it was crippled by internal divisions. Its members were convinced of the need to save South Vietnam from Communism, but most of them were coming reluctantly to the conclusion that Ngo Dinh Diem was misruling South Vietnam so badly that he had become a liability for the anti-Communist struggle. General O'Daniel, however, national chairman until September 1963, supported Diem very strongly. The split prevented the AFV from exerting serious influence in any direction during 1963, and the organization had essentially collapsed by mid 1964.

It revived in late 1964 and early 1965, first urging escalation of American military efforts and then, after President Johnson had indeed escalated, publicly endorsing what the president had done. The AFV's calls for the United States to bomb North Vietnam apparently had no impact on the President's decision to do so, but its support after the fact did have some effect, increasing public support for the U.S. military effort. For the next few years the AFV released statements, provided speakers to take the pro-war position in debates on the war, and so forth. The White House was grateful, and during 1965 gave the AFV some quiet help with its financial problems, by arranging introductions to wealthy donors. But by 1967 the White House, disappointed with the impact of the AFV on the public debate, had decided to encourage the establishment of a new group, the Citizens Committee for Peace and Freedom in Vietnam. The AFV hung on until the fall of Saigon, remaining a voice in the arguments over the war, but not a loud one.

The ways the disparate groups within the AFV got along or failed to get along with one another, with the White House, and with the Republic of Vietnam and its ambassadors in Washington, provide fascinating and important insights into the politics of the Cold War and the Vietnam War. On these matters, while Morgan was not able to answer all the crucial questions (he is for example uncertain of the AFV's relations with the CIA), he seems to have presented all the important information he was able to find.

On the actual policy issues, the details of the message that the AFV presented to the American government and public, there are serious gaps. Morgan says much that is useful but could and should have said more. In the

early 1970s, for example, one of the organization's main efforts was a serial (really a pamphlet series—the typical issue was a single article by a single author) called *Southeast Asian Perspectives*. All Morgan has to say about the content is that the articles took a strong anti-Communist line, and generally backed President Nixon's Asian policy, though occasionally expressing doubt over Nixon's opening to China. This reviewer, wanting a little more detail, checked a couple of issues and found one that predicted, partly on the basis of an exaggerated account of what had happened in North Vietnam in the mid 1950s, that if the Communists were to take South Vietnam, they would promptly launch a massive bloodbath; “the minimum number of those to be butchered will exceed one million and could rise to several times that figure.”[1] A later issue took the story of what had happened in North Vietnam in the mid 1950s into greater detail, exaggerating by more than a factor of ten the number of people the Communists executed.[2]

The reviewer wonders: was there anyone in the AFV at this time who was embarrassed by these exaggerations? Joseph Buttinger had known enough so he would have been embarrassed, but by 1972 he was long gone. It seems possible that the reason the AFV's exaggerations about Communist atrocities in North Vietnam in the 1950s did not catch Morgan's attention enough for him to mention them in his book is that Morgan did not realize they were exaggerations. He does not seem to know as much about Vietnam, and the war there, as he does about events in the United States.

When had the AFV begun talking in such lurid terms about a Communist bloodbath in Vietnam? Had it been doing so in 1965? Morgan in fact gives very little detail about the statements of AFV spokesmen in the debates that started in 1965. He says they defended U.S. policy, but does not really say anything about the nature of the defense.

The addition of twenty or forty pages on such matters would greatly have strengthened this book, without stretching it to an unreasonable length. But we should be grateful for what we have; if Joseph Morgan had not chosen to write this history of the American Friends of Vietnam, this reviewer doubts than anyone else would ever have written one as good.

Notes:

[1]. P. J. Honey, “Vietnam: If the Communists Won,” *Southeast Asian Perspectives*, no. 2 (June 1971), p. 26.

[2]. Daniel E. Teodoru, "The Bloodbath Hypothesis: The Maoist Pattern in North Vietnam's Radical Land Reform," *Southeast Asian Perspectives*, no. 9 (March 1973), esp. pp. 78-79.

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