

the U.S. Constitution, the charter has proved “a living document” that can adjust to new circumstances, as happened when the Security Council pointedly refused to condemn NATO’s 1999 “humanitarian” war in Kosovo, though it had been waged without explicit UN authorization.

To address the potential threat of terrorists armed with weapons of mass destruction, the Security Council will need to update the concept of “anticipatory self-defense,” Stromseth argues. But the new U.S. doctrine of preventive war goes too far and “has the potential to be destabilizing.”

The United States, she writes, “has a stake in

maintaining rules governing the use of force that can both protect American security and help to mobilize allies against those who challenge the agreed rules.”

The “harder issue,” in Stromseth’s view, will be how to enable the Security Council to enforce its own mandates. For several years before the war, “the council lacked collective spine on Iraq.” One way to begin revitalizing the body, she suggests, would be to appoint longer-term temporary members on the basis of the substantive contributions they would make to UN efforts, including peacekeeping and other enforcement mechanisms, as well as protection of human rights.

JFK’s Secret Formula for Vietnam

“Exit Strategy” by James K. Galbraith, in *Boston Review* (Oct.–Nov. 2003), E53-407, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Mass. 02139.

“Let us continue,” President Lyndon B. Johnson urged after the assassination of John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963. Most historians have agreed that in gradually escalating U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, Johnson did what Kennedy would have done. They dismiss the contrary view as wishful hindsight by JFK admirers. But Galbraith, who holds a chair in government and business relations at the University of Texas’s Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, believes that the tide of scholarly opinion may be shifting in response to documentary evidence that Kennedy had secretly committed the United States to a phased withdrawal from South Vietnam.

The documents are not new, and neither is the debate. In *Kennedy’s Wars* (2000), historian Lawrence Freedman maintains that JFK’s plan for a withdrawal from Vietnam after the 1964 presidential election was “less of a definite decision than a working assumption, based on a hope for stability rather than an expectation of chaos.” Kennedy, in short, was keeping his options open. But Galbraith (whose father, John Kenneth Galbraith, was a JFK adviser) makes the case afresh for the other side.

On October 2, 1963, JFK received a report from Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara and General Maxwell Taylor, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), urging withdrawal of 1,000 of the 17,000 mili-

tary advisers then in Vietnam by the end of the year, and completion of a phased withdrawal of the rest by the end of 1965.

Kennedy had the recommendation publicly announced, and three days later secretly decided to withdraw the 1,000 advisers by December, but to have it done in a routine way, not raising the matter formally with South Vietnamese president Ngo Dinh Diem. That shows that the decision “was not a ruse or pressure tactic to win reforms from Diem” as some historians have claimed, according to Galbraith. Then, on October 11, the White House issued National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 263, secretly ordering implementation of the October 2 recommendations, including full withdrawal by the end of 1965.

JCS documents released in 1998 show “that Kennedy was well aware of the evidence that South Vietnam was, in fact, losing the war,” says Galbraith. But the withdrawal he’d decided on “was unconditional, and did not depend on military progress or lack of it.”

On November 1, Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, were killed in a coup that Kennedy had quietly encouraged, not expecting Diem’s death. Galbraith says the affair was symptomatic of a Kennedy White House that was “fractious, disorganized, preoccupied with American politics, ignorant of the forces it

faced in Vietnam.”

Four days after Kennedy’s death, U.S. policy changed: In NASM 273, Johnson authorized covert commando raids against North Vietnam by CIA-supported South Vietnamese forces, which would lead, notes Galbraith, to the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident “and eventually to the wider war.”

Like Kennedy, Johnson “knew that Vietnam was a trap,” Galbraith says. But the public knew nothing of Kennedy’s plan. “To maintain our commitment, therefore, was to maintain the illusion of continuity, and this—in the moment of trauma that followed the assassination—was Johnson’s paramount political objective.”

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

The Depression’s Bright Side

“The Most Technologically Progressive Decade of the Century” by Alexander J. Field, in *The American Economic Review* (Sept. 2003), 2014 Broadway, Ste. 305, Nashville, Tenn. 37203.

Maybe the Great Depression was not so bad after all. In fact, it was a lot better than that. It was “*the most technologically progressive of any comparable period in U.S. economic history*,” Field emphatically declares.

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