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SAIGON--Edward G. Lansdale is the Quiet American in the quiet political war here--which may determine the future of Viet Nam.

In 1961, President John F. Kennedy formally asked the retired Air Force general to become Ambassador to Vietnam--but the proposal was rescinded when several top-ranking Cabinet members threatened to resign if the Lansdale appointment was pushed through.

Now, four years later, Lansdale is the right-hand man of an even more prestigious ambassador, Henry Cabot Lodge.

Officially, the 57-year-old retired general is special assistant to Ambassador Lodge and immediately upon his arrival, Lansdale announced his sole task was to support Lodge. Lodge officially appointed Lansdale, shortly after his arrival, as the American representative on a joint American-Vietnamese government committee to re-gain the villagers in the Vietnamese countryside.

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The renown of Lodge in American politics, in the United Nations and in Europe is counter-balanced by Lansdale's ~~conver~~ controversial, glamorous and mysterious past in Asian politics.

Lansdale, with smoky dark eyes and acid face, was the model for the legendary Colonel Hillandale, the famous ragtime kid in the "The Ugy Ugly American," who hypnotized Asian villagers with harmonica music, palm-reading and a busy bushy red mustache. He is also the model ~~figure~~ in Graham Greene's novel, "The Quiet American," the naive college graduate who attempts to build a third power bloc in Asian countries--only to be assassinated under a Saigon bridge.

But, each of these intriguing and movie-star images of Lansdale captures only limited aspects of a man who is as complex and nebulous as the politics of the Asian countries he has worked in during the past quarter century.

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In the 1930's, Lansdale worked in the advertising business, and according to observers, "he wrote alot of copy and he never forgot how. He's a good salesman who knows how to reach people."

During the pre-war days, he was also a military reserve officer and during his summer camp training, he grounded himself in infantry tactics. As an Air Force general, he probably knows as much about scouting, patrolling and small unit actions as some ground commanders.

During World War II, he was assis assigned to Asia to work as a special assistant on intelligence matters "of a very complex and sensitive nature."

At the end of World War II, he landed in the Philippines, first in the counter-intelligence corps--"He's very well grounded in intelligence"--and later in the public relations field. In both areas, he came to know the Filipino people and the leaders of the infant, post-war government.

Among his acqun acquaintances, was a young Filipino Congressman named Ramon Magsaysay--"and they hit it off." Later, the young Congressmen was apointe appointed Secretary of National Defense--and it is often charged that Lansdale became deeply involved in Filipino politics to get him the post.



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Later, Magsaysay became President as more than 80,000 armed pro-Communist Huk rebels virtually controlled every the suburbs of Manila. Lansdale remained Magsaysay's close friend and functioned as his McGeorge Bundy; the President called him "Brother Ed;" during the night if Magsaysay thought of a pro was stumped by a problem, he would wander into the next room, sit on the edge of Lansdale's bed and they would discuss throughout the night the possible solutions.

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The Magsaysay-Lansdale strategy was to give to the Huks a left-hand of friendship and a right-hand of force; the psychological warfare theme was for the Huks was to re-join the Manila government and they would be given land, water buffalo and rice seed--if they continued to oppose the government they would be destroyed.

"The Huks had a clear alternative--and an alternative with some dignity," one source explained. "Lansdale, the ex-professional advertiser, was a psywar pro--the psywar campaign against the Huks was a masterpiece.

"But Lansdale was not a kingmaker and Magsaysay the puppet--Magsaysay in his own right was an unusual man and he leaned on another unusual man-Lansdale," the source explained.

During this period, the American military and foreign service bureaucracy, working with Filipino counterparts along conventional lines, became increasingly aware of Lansdale influence and a great deal of resentment of certain personalities developed against Lansdale.

"From this point on, people divided into two camps--they were either, totally for Lansdale or violently against him, with a sparsely populated middle-camp," one observer explained.



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"He soon became the kind of guy that people didn't ignore. Once he decided to help Magsaysay, he played a no-holds-barred game, and he was often accused of being deeply involved in Filipino politics."

In 1954, Lansdale was assigned to South Vietnam for temporary duty; "he thought it would be for a short time, but it was damn near four years before he got out," according to reliable sources. When he arrived in the South, Vietnamese politics were in a shambles. The enemy was not the Communists--who were retreating after the Geneva Agreements to Communist North Vietnam. The immediate enemy was the French. The French and Americans shared a common strategic interest in wanting the South to remain out of Communist hands; but the French wanted a pro-French puppet government; the Americans wanted Ngo Dinh Diem.

"Lansdale was invaluable to Diem and in some ways repeated the performance of Magsaysay," one observer explained. "Lansdale was a progressive influence on Diem."

"Early days of the Diem regime, were turbulent, one Vietnamese observer explained. "The French incited the religious sects and the pirate Binh Xuyen to fight Diem. The cloak and dagger operations between the American intelligence officers and the French Deuxieme Bureau would make James Bond look like an amateur. There was fighting on the streets of Saigon, payoffs to dissident leaders, assassinations and counter-assassinations."



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Dien and Lansdale won the first round of the battle; but Lansdale is departure in the market fall of 1957 the "beginning of the end of the Dien regime--and the anti-Dien campaigns gained in momentum."

Because of his unorthodox procedures, Lansdale was virtually exiled from Vietnam by the American bureaucracy--until in late October 1961, he accompanied General Maxwell D. Taylor to Vietnam on the famous mission which later lead to massive American involvement.

"Lansdale was the ninth~~4~~ -ranking member of the famous Taylor mission--the last man on the plane and the last man off type of affair, with all the protocol up front. He observed propriety and he left as quietly as he arrived."

During this time, President Kennedy reportedly asked him to become Ambassador, but high-ranking Administration members failed to agree; now four years later, the advise of Vice-President Hubert Humphry reportedly convinced ~~Ex~~ President Lyndon Johnson to send Lansdale again to Viet Nam.



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"So, now he's back. He knows he has a tough row to hoe," one observer explained. "He's the object of suspicion by the American military who fear that his sleight-of-hands will seize some of their power. He's an unorthodox figure in the middle of a bureaucracy's structure. He is suspected by the Central Intelligence Agency as an operator carte blanche. He's suspected by the American Foreign Service officials because they know he's a political animal as well as an Air Force general. If He's suspected by the Vietnamese bureaucrats because they think he's looking for an new Magsaysay and they don't know who that is. To alot of Vietnamese has been, Lansdale is a means of coming back into prominence. To many people, Lansdale spells controversy and a cause of alarm.

"He's working against enormous ~~of~~ odds. The real enemy is now the Communists-but that will be the least of his worries. He has alot of % other problems to solve before he gets a clean shot at the enemy.

"Vietnam now a bewilderingly complex ballgame and Lansdale has come into the middle of it."