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How America 'Lost the Peace'

By JAMES CHACE

With a Wilsonian zeal to participate in great causes - causes "as big as the whole world itself" - Richard Nixon in this strongly argued, often intemperate polemic urges Americans to contest aggression wherever it rears its head. "It is no longer enough to look for the smoking gun," he warns us in a metaphor evocative of Watergate, "now we must look for the hidden hand." That hand is, more often than not, the Soviet hand. And even when it isn't, Mr. Nixon contends, "wherever we lose, (the Russians) win." Thus Mr. Nixon calls for nothing less than the global containment of Communism by the United States. Lest the reader fear that such a worldwide crusade will lead to worldwide armed intervention by the United States, the former President reassures us that if we follow his prescription - a defense buildup at home and a massive economic program for the third world - we will have "no more Vietnams" because "we will not *fail* again."

**NO MORE
VIETNAMS**

By Richard Nixon.

This is the third book on foreign policy Mr. Nixon has written since publishing his memoirs. The first, "The Real War" (1980), centered on the threats to the United States from the Soviet Union. The second, "Real Peace" (1984), defended his policy of "hardheaded detente" with the Soviet Union by arguing that the incentives of East-West trade might moderate Soviet behavior, particularly in the third world.

"No More Vietnams" is two books. The first is a highly selective history of the Vietnam War - a war, as he tells it, that we won. We then, however, "lost the peace." The second and more interesting book (confined unfortunately to one of his six chapters) is his program to win the hearts and minds - and stomachs - of the third world.

Mr. Nixon's history of the Vietnam War expands on the interpretation given in his memoirs. He stresses throughout his need to threaten to bomb North Vietnam in order to force Hanoi to sue for peace. This threat was at the heart of his effort to win the war, a strategy he explained to his aide H. R. Haldeman this way:

"I call it the Madman Theory, Bob. I want the North Vietnamese to believe that I've reached the point where I might do *anything* to stop the war."

The bombing of Cambodia to wipe out the North Vietnamese sanctuaries in 1969, he says, made Hanoi resume negotiations with the United States in Paris; unfortunately, little else happened. Only in the fall of 1972, when the United States dropped its demand that the North Vietnamese withdraw from the South and North Vietnam no longer insisted on unilateral American withdrawal, did peace seem at hand. But since Mr. Nixon had been reducing our armed forces all along, South Vietnam's President Nguyen Van Thieu, fearing final American withdrawal would mean the North Vietnamese would ultimately control all of Vietnam, balked. Hanoi then stiffened its demands.

To compel Hanoi to agree to Washington's terms and doubtless to demonstrate his willingness to support the Thieu Government after America's withdrawal, Mr. Nixon unleashed furious bombing raids against the Hanoi-Haiphong complex in December 1972 - the so-called Christmas bombing. In 11 days, American aircraft flew almost 3,000 sorties and dropped some 40,000 tons of bombs. It was not, Mr. Nixon insists, "carpet bombing." But it certainly brought home the message to Hanoi that the Madman Theory should not be dismissed out of hand.

On Dec. 30, 1972, Washington stopped the bombing. On Jan. 8, 1973, negotiations reconvened. On Jan. 27, a peace agreement was signed, very little different from the draft worked out in October. And so, Mr. Nixon writes, "We had won the second Vietnam War."

Following this account of our so-called victory in Vietnam, Mr. Nixon explains "how we lost the peace." His short answer is "Congressional irresponsibility" - Congress refused to finance United States air support and supplies to sustain the South Vietnamese Government. He also cites the "outcry over Watergate" that prevented him from countering Hanoi's shipments of additional men and supplies to its forces in the south in violation of the Paris peace accords.

Had there been no Watergate, would it have been different? Would Mr. Nixon's aim - to maintain, by American aid and the threat of bombing, a non-Communist government in South Vietnam - have succeeded? If I read him correctly, Mr. Nixon thinks not. He is too much of a politician not to understand the "profound backlash against our involvement in the war, which antedated our Watergate problems." But he seems not to comprehend why the American people did not support the war after the mid-1960's. Americans simply did not perceive Vietnam as vital to American interests, and therefore saw a gross disparity between ends and means in the war. Most Americans felt that the means used - the bombs, the money, the lives - far exceeded the ends to which they were employed: to preserve a government in Southeast Asia, a region of marginal importance to our strategic concerns.

In his insistence on combating Communism worldwide - all the more necessary after "losing" Vietnam to the Communists - Mr. Nixon insists as well on a very broad definition of America's vital interests. He rejects as too narrow the defense of Western Europe, Japan, and oil supplies in the Persian Gulf. For example, he makes a persuasive case for including Israel, even though Israel is not an American vital interest from a strategic viewpoint. But, as Mr. Nixon points out, the United States does have a moral and political commitment to preserving the integrity of Israel - "an island of democracy in a sea of totalitarian states" - if Israel should prove unable to defend itself. But then the list simply peters out into "other small countries where our interests, and the interests of

the people of those countries, may be served by U.S. assistance in their efforts to resist Communist aggression." All this leads to Mr. Nixon's call not to let any "instance of Soviet aggression anywhere in the Third World . . . go unchallenged by the West." His vast program would return the United States to the days of global containment, recalling the rhetoric of John F. Kennedy, who wrote that Americans are "by destiny rather than choice the watchmen on the walls of world freedom." Mr. Nixon, not surprisingly, prefers to quote Thomas Jefferson, who expansively declared, "We act not for ourselves alone but for the whole human race." To combat Communism, Mr. Nixon believes, we should not wait for danger to emerge over the horizon. Instead, he says we should encourage peaceful change in the third world, for "if there is no hope for peaceful change, violent change is inevitable." To do that, his third world economic program "must be structured in such a way that those who receive (aid) will have a strong incentive to adopt political and economic policies that promote both progress and justice." He points out that "we spend 7 percent of our gross national product on defense and two-tenths of 1 percent on economic aid," but he does not simply recommend government-to-government foreign assistance. He insists that governments receiving help adopt policies that will attract foreign investment. Equally important, the United States should establish trade policies that will help third world countries.

THE central problem is implementing these proposals - many of which are eminently desirable. As Mr. Nixon should know better than most people, there seems little disposition these days to embark on a policy of global containment of Communism through trade and aid, even less to put into effect an ambitious economic program for the third world. Congress gutted most of President Reagan's Caribbean Basin Initiative, designed to lower United States trade barriers. Moreover, under the Reagan Administration, America's trade deficit in 1984 reached \$123.3 billion - hardly an incentive for the United States to lower trade barriers. If anything, more protectionism is likely. And high interest rates in the United States only make it harder for third world debtor nations to service their debts to American banks.

The world Richard Nixon envisages is not the world we live in now. If economic assistance is unlikely to win enthusiastic support at home, military intervention to contain Communism is also certain to come under strong criticism from Congress and the American people - largely as a consequence of America's Vietnam "victory." True, the Reagan Administration could get away with a military action to topple a Marxist government on Grenada because the operation was quick and small. But the Administration, much to its frustration, has not been able to increase the small number of United States military advisers in El Salvador; and Congress has cut off all aid to the rebels fighting the Marxist Sandinista Government of Nicaragua. Like his hero Woodrow Wilson, Mr. Nixon may well find himself crying in the wilderness for a world that cannot be.

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