

the President, first me and then President Ford, the power to enforce the peace agreements, and for refusing to provide the military aid that South Vietnamese needed in order to meet the North Vietnamese offensive on equal terms.

But Congress was in part the prisoner of events. The leaders of the United States in the crucial years of the early and mid-1960s failed to come up with a strategy that would produce victory. Instead, first they undermined a strong regime, and then simply poured more and more U.S. troops and materiel into South Vietnam in an ineffective effort to shore up the weaker regimes that followed. They misled the public by insisting we were winning the war and thereby prepared the way for defeatism and demagoguery later on. The American people could not be expected to continue indefinitely to support a war in which they were told victory was around the corner, but which required greater and greater effort without any obvious signs of improvement.

By following the strategy I initiated in 1969, we and the South Vietnamese were able to win the war militarily by the time of the Paris accords of January 27, 1973. The 550,000 American troops that were in Vietnam when I came into office in 1969 had been withdrawn and South Vietnam was able to defend itself—if we supplied the arms the Paris accords allowed.

But the public had been so misinformed and misled by unwise government actions and the shallow, inflammatory treatment of events by the media that morale within the United States collapsed just when the North was overwhelmingly defeated on the battlefield. We won a victory after a long hard struggle, but then we threw it away. The communists had grasped what strategic analyst Brian Crozier said is the central point of revolutionary war: "that it is won or lost on the home front." The war-making capacity of North Vietnam had been virtually destroyed by the bombings in December of 1972, and we had the means to make and enforce a just peace, a peace with honor. But we were denied these means when Congress prohibited military operations in or over Indochina and cut back drastically on the aid South Vietnam needed to defend itself. In the final analysis, a major part of the blame must be borne by those who encouraged or participated in the fateful decisions that got us into the war in the 1960's, and who then by their later actions sabotaged our efforts to get us out in an acceptable way in the 1970's.

By inaction at the crucial moment, the United States undermined an ally and abandoned him to his fate. The effect on the millions of Cambodians, Laotians, and South Vietnamese who relied on us and have now paid the price of communist reprisals is bad enough. But the cost in terms of raising doubts among our allies as to America's reliability, and in terms of the encouragement it gives to our potential enemies to engage in aggression against our friends in other parts of the world, will be devastating for U.S. policy for decades to come. . . .