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The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked

Douglas Kinnard

Leslie H. Gelb

Richard K. Betts

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accomplishing exactly what they sought—worldwide publicity for their cause. Only when some means is found of reducing or eliminating this publicity will a major step have been taken toward the reduction or elimination of the illness itself.

Despite the comparative paucity of affirmative accomplishment with respect to terrorism by the world community, these two volumes undoubtedly will prove invaluable as concentrated guidance for those involved in this area of world problems, as well as educational for the average citizen in enabling him to better understand what has and has not been done, why more has not been done, and, perhaps, what might possibly be done in the future to solve one of the major world problems of the second half of the 20th century.

HOWARD S. LEVIE
Professor Emeritus of Law
Saint Louis University Law School

Gelb, Leslie H. and Betts, Richard K.
The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1979. 387pp.

The output of books on the American experience in Vietnam has reached the proportions of a small industry. Peter Braestrup, in a bibliographical essay in the Spring 1978 *Wilson Quarterly*, brought us up to date but since then the cascade continues. There is little hope that there will be a letup soon. The best we can hope for is that a good percentage of the new works will be useful for the future historian, or useful to the present student of that long war. This book is worthwhile on both counts.

Irony is thoroughly researched, and draws heavily on the *Pentagon Papers*. The study from which those *Papers* came was headed by Gelb in the 1960s. The period covered in the book is the same as that study—from World War II until the Tet 1968 Offensive.

The title pretty much sums up the authors' thesis. Contrary to those who contend that U.S. decisionmakers blundered into the Vietnam quagmire, the authors contend that American leaders knew they were getting into a long struggle. They do not contend, of course, that the events of 1968 were foreseen, but they do say that U.S. leadership recognized victory might well be unreachable. After the Tet 1968 Offensive, LBJ decided to deescalate because the price of continuing was too high, and the key variable in that war of attrition, American public opinion, was itself victim of attrition. Through all of this period "the system worked," say Gelb and Betts.

The book is divided into five parts. Part One is a very useful review of U.S. decisions concerning Vietnam from the Roosevelt administration until LBJ's deescalation decision. Part Two, "The Imperative Not to Lose," is built around the proposition that U.S. leaders believed Vietnam not to be vital in itself, but rather feared the domestic and international implications of the "loss" of Vietnam in the wake of the "losses" of China and the Korean war.

The central proposition of Part Three is that the U.S. presidents involved did what they deemed minimally necessary to keep Vietnam out of Communist hands. Part Four expands on the following proposition:

The Presidents and most of their lieutenants were not deluded by reports of progress and did not proceed on the basis of optimism about winning a near-term or even longer-term military victory. This proposition will engender, no doubt, some controversy, depending on whom one considers presidential "lieutenants," and the year one is talking about.

Part Five, "Conclusions," is the authors' attempt to set forth the lessons of Vietnam—a brave effort for anyone. Here, as they were writing in late 1978,

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Gelb and Betts felt compelled to extend their study and to take a look at Nixon's and Ford's policies. It is understandable that they would feel it necessary to review this later period before pronouncing judgment. However, the coverage is so brief that the insight and research is not of the high caliber of the remainder of the book.

After supporting their thesis that the system worked, the authors develop two schools of thought on Vietnam, summed up and evaluated as follows:

The Win School would have America vindicate mistakes in victory, while the Reformist School would have it avoid another mistake. Neither is comforting. The former gives promise of only threats and force. The latter suggests a certain naivete. . . . The problem, then, is not so much prevention as extrication, and the solution is not so much governmental restructuring as changing fundamental attitudes about and within the system.

Finally Gelb and Betts conclude that the basic lesson of the Vietnam war is "the need for pragmatism more than doctrines, formulas, and ideologies."

In the area of its main effort, an explication and analysis of Washington decisionmaking on the Vietnam war up to Tet 1968, the book is excellent and makes a fine contribution to the growing body of literature on the war. Upper level Political Science courses interested in the study of Presidential decisionmaking will find it especially useful.

DOUGLAS KINNARD
University of Vermont

Gorshkov, S.G. *The Sea Power of the State*. Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute Press, 1979, 290pp.

It may be that Admiral Gorshkov's book will be as frequently cited and as seldom read as Mahan's *The Influence*

of *Seapower Upon History* is nowadays, but there seems little question but that it "will influence navies and governments for the rest of this century." This last judgment is from a review article, "A Primer on S.G. Gorshkov's *Sea Power of the State*," that appeared in the Spring 1977 issue of this journal. That review was of a translation prepared by the Naval Intelligence Support Center, and while the translation was widely available to those who knew how to seek it out, one couldn't pop into the local bookstore for a copy. That inconvenience has been erased with this, the commercial publication of the "authorized" English version.

Because of the earlier review here, this note will not presume to provide further analysis of the work but rather is intended to announce the book's availability and to applaud the decision of the Naval Institute Press to arrange, with Great Britain's Pergamon Press, its American distribution.

Some of Gorshkov's views, particularly on differing American and Soviet rationale for and contribution to several episodes in World War II, will be offensive to some readers, but an awareness of those views adds, as does the study of this book, to our understanding of the design and purpose of the man and the powerful and impressive Soviet fleet that he has built. *Sea Power* is essential, not just to the naval officer, not just to the military professional, but to all who ponder international security questions.

W. R. PETTYJOHN
Commander, U.S. Navy

Heilbroner, Robert L. *Beyond Boom and Crash*. New York: 1978. 111pp.

In an age known to Michael Harrington as "The Twilight of Capitalism," one rarely encounters authors temerarious enough to protest that reports of the demise of capitalism are, indeed, greatly exaggerated. Witness the personification of capitalism, Henry Ford,