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Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States and the Modern Historical Experience

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On the POW-MIA problem, this lack of scope was equally frustrating to author and reader. The book reports that members of the Swedish mission, who have the most freedom of action among foreigners in Vietnam (why?), report seeing Americans on work gangs. But the Vietnamese official in charge of North American affairs repeated the usual line: "They have all been released. There may be a handful who chose to stay here, but no one is being held against their will."

Looking at the U.S. entry into the war from the view today in Vietnam, Mr. Broyles is succinct, if not altogether precisely accurate: "And the fear that started it all, the fear of Chinese expansion. Well, we are now China's most important ally, while China's most bitter enemy, and the staunchest foe of its expansion into Southeast Asia, is of course Vietnam."

One would like some of the academics, journalists, policymakers, etc., who enthused over the Vietnam intervention, to make a journey such as Mr. Broyles did. Everyone can make a list of prospective tourists: this reviewer's would certainly include Joseph Alsop, the Bundy Brothers, Samuel Huntington and Walt Rostow. If they can't go, maybe they could read *Brothers in Arms*.

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Modern Historical Experience. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985. 628pp. \$25

"The Vietnam War was the most challenging military experience in U.S. history, a synthesis of politics, technology, the residues of past wars, convoluted logic, and symbolism—all merged with enormous firepower and a surrealistic mixture of illusion and clarity on the part of American leaders." With this statement, Gabriel Kolko begins chapter 14 in his latest work.

The potential reader is cautioned not to be fooled by the title—this is only an account of the war in Vietnam to the extent that a minutely detailed analysis, for example, of social conditions in Weimar, Germany in the 1920s tells the story of World War II. More than anything, this book chronicles the Communist Party of Vietnam to a degree perhaps unequalled in any other work and is, for this reason alone, probably worthwhile reading for those who may be interested in what is, according to the Marxist framework within which the author conducts his analysis, the "modern historical experience."

A good deal of the book is devoted to examining the organization which Ho Chi Minh was able to develop and nurture, with particular focus on postwar retreat by the colonial powers which was the result of, "above all, the relationship of the united [opposition] front to the class struggle over land." If the reader can sift through the author's obvious sympathy—almost to the point of fawning—for Ho and the movement

in general, it is difficult not to be impressed by the case he makes that there never really was any question to those in the North that the U.S.-backed South would never prevail. Indeed, the author rather convincingly suggests that there may even have been elements in the United States, particularly in the Central Intelligence Agency, which recognized this as well.

While the book is generally a credible piece of scholarship, the author too frequently permits his views to wear through. For example, he has fallen for the old standby reason for U.S. involvement in Vietnam in the first place: rubber. Very authoritatively but, alas, without reference, he tells us that "Raw materials, though less publicly cited than earlier, were still prominent in the decision makers' vision" as late as 1961.

Despite the coloring this is an important book. The portion in which the author deals with the political economy of the war and its effect on Western financial relationships, is the best such approach—perhaps the only—in the literature on Vietnam. In addition, Mr. Kolko is surprisingly critical of the Tet Offensive, resulting as it did in the "NLF . . . [loss of] most of its already fragile urban infrastructure"; he summarizes the issue as one which was costly but nevertheless crucial as a consciousness-raising evolution for both the U.S. planners and the "educated urban elements" in the South.

One can choose to accept or not Mr. Kolko's fundamental Marxist

assumptions and his subsequent glorification of the Communist Party of Vietnam; nevertheless, one cannot reject the nature of the beast as he describes it. Most importantly, though, Gabriel Kolko has given us a primer on how not to wage war against an enemy with whom we are essentially ill-equipped to engage. In so doing, he has, unquestionably, without meaning to, validated the underlying principle of what has become known as "the Reagan doctrine." The nature of warfare has changed and our commitment to support noncommunist insurgencies with unconventional means testifies to our recognition of this most urgent "lesson of Vietnam." Kolko suggests, though, that "the modern historical experience" will prove us unequal to the task.

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Nuechterlein, Donald E. *America Overcommitted: United States National Interests in the 1980's*. Lexington, Kentucky: The University of Kentucky Press, 1985. 238pp. \$23

Sometimes a title does a disservice to a book. Such is the case with Donald Nuechterlein's latest study of the underlying structural bases of American foreign policy, *America Overcommitted*. One might expect handwringing from a *quid nunc* pundit. Those who have followed Nuechterlein's thoughtful development of a logical structure for identification of the nature and degree of national