

The United Nations, the Ballot, and International Intervention, 2001, 171 pp.). Smith's work makes a valuable contribution in both explaining the nature of peacekeeping in East Timor and providing some useful lessons for such operations. Most of all, it reminds the reader that the United Nations, which is constrained by its member-states, still has a long way to go in preparing for low-intensity conflicts around the world, in which, as General Smith warns, it will most likely find itself involved more often.

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***Vietnam and Beyond: A Diplomat's Cold War Education.* By Robert Hopkins Miller.** Lubbock, Texas, USA: Texas Tech University Press, Modern Southeast Asia Series, 2002. 247pp.

Cover to cover, *Vietnam and Beyond* is an interesting read. The author, Robert Miller, used his long career in the U.S. foreign service as the prism through which he viewed the highs and lows of American foreign policy from post-World War II to the end of the Cold War. In this history, the highlight of this lifelong dedication to the foreign service is the author's posting to Saigon as well as his involvement in the negotiations, both as a middle-level officer in the State Department in charge of Vietnam (Vietnam Working Group) and as a member of the U.S. delegation at the Paris Peace Talks with Vietnam. Miller's assertions regarding key decisions as well as key personnel in the State Department (for whom he worked) and in the Defence Department (with whom he had to work) are fairly guarded, and as a result uncontroversial. Even though he did not rise to the very top of the bureaucratic hierarchy in the State Department, his presence at the key moments of U.S. foreign policy towards Vietnam renders him a legitimate voice on the state of play at that time. The facts in Miller's assertions also appear to be well supported by declassified official documents.

The reviewer came away after reading the book sensing that the author's life was well-led and his experience of the Vietnam War was fairly straightforward. It was also privileged, given his position as a foreign service officer in Saigon. Like many others who were veterans, Miller also gave an account of blood and tears. He was a casualty in the bomb attack on the U.S. Embassy in Saigon in 1965. It is useful to

remember, however, that this is a diplomat's memoir whose perspectives are different from those of the ordinary Vietnamese, or the foot-soldiers of the United States in the war. Miller's posting was not a plum, but in no way could he have experienced Vietnam the way ordinary Vietnamese did. This is a perspective I sorely missed but later realized that I was looking for something that was never there.

Cutting to the point, indeed, the value of a book ultimately depends on what the reader is looking for. *Vietnam and Beyond* is most useful to two groups of people. The first group comprises scholars researching the U.S. public policy process, warts and all. The second group comprises scholars who may want to unravel the role of a myriad range of actors in the U.S. Embassy during the foundational stage of Kennedy's policy towards Vietnam. The book is not useful for military historians unless they want to be informed about the political aspects of the war. There are no details of battles and strategy in the war.

Where U.S. national strategy towards Vietnam is concerned, the author does discuss the foreign policy component as well as the generality of that strategy, but the analysis does not go deeper into discussing, and perhaps even substantiating, his assertion that the Vietnam strategy he preferred would have made a difference to history. What the book does show, and this point has been well-noted before, is that the American plunge into Vietnam was done with strategic haste, having little background understanding — especially the historical background of colonialism, exploitation, and revolution — of what Vietnamese think of Vietnam and how strategic moves by the United States should be considered within that context. For instance, the author noted that when Nguyen Khanh executed the coup in 1964, "...so unfamiliar were we with the political dynamics of the body politic (and military) in the wake of Diem's demise that we were uncertain whether Khanh's coup was a good thing or a bad thing for U.S. goals and objectives" (p. 75). Vietnam was obviously a new frontier for many American diplomats and the State Department.

There is also no new perspective on the Vietnam War and how it is related to the Cold War to be found in *Vietnam and Beyond*. Miller's schooling during World War II, and perhaps also his first posting to Europe (Paris and Brussels) after the War, shaped his views of the geostrategic chessboard. In Europe, he encountered the Cold War theatre right at its heart. When he was posted to Saigon in 1960, as he admitted, he had absolutely no experience on Asia, let alone Vietnam. Yet the Cold War was heightening and there was no time to think thoroughly what the U.S. involvement was about and how it should be conducted. More importantly, thinking about what Southeast Asians want and what Vietnamese want were completely absent from this chessboard, as

was the case for most people who were working on U.S. policy in Southeast Asia.

As expected, the book also touches on the role of Henry Kissinger in foreign policy making, especially in the alleged regular intervention by Kissinger over the authority of the State Department. There is a certain emphasis by the author on the negative aspects of Kissinger's role in U.S. foreign policy. Perhaps this is a reaction from Miller, in part caused by Kissinger's attempts in the post-Vietnam era to exonerate himself through his own writing. Miller does not hide, like many other commentators on the Vietnam policy of the Nixon Administration and the Vietnam War, his refusal to accept the Nixon–Kissinger assertion that the retreat from Vietnam was honourable.

Miller has a bigger regret: the U.S. usurpation of a war that should have been fought by the Vietnamese themselves. He claims that South Vietnam was being drowned with too much advice, too much aid, that they did not know what to do, and that this was a major reason why U.S. involvement ended in deep disappointment. Because the South was so overwhelmed by the United States, the latter had no choice but to take over. Miller had wanted the Vietnamese to take ownership of the war. He thinks the United States should have let the southern Vietnamese fight the war on their own terms, with the United States merely helping with supplies and watching — a policy line guaranteed to succeed.

With some hindsight, one may even say that Miller's suggestions would never have found favour. At the height of the Cold War during the early 1960s, reaching a peak at the Cuban missile crisis, the United States was keenly concerned with the proxy war strategy of the Soviet Union, a strategy that successive U.S. administrations believed needed to be confronted through military containment in the proxy countries. Containment? Yes, but how? Striking military alliances and propping up weak but democratically elected regimes is one way, and helping them to fight their wars against communist enemies is another. Not doing anything would have meant ultimately an encirclement of the United States.

Perhaps the best assessment of Miller's argument is that its logic is sound but it is purely academic as it was not enunciated forcefully enough to attract the attention of policy-makers. Thus, in this sense, it was an idea worthy of its time but whose time did not arrive, given the wider geostrategic environment, and perhaps Miller's own considerations regarding the propriety of going high profile in the light of his own career. It would have changed his life completely.

Is there any relevance of what has been discussed about the strategy in the Vietnam War to the war on terrorism? There are some grounds for

comparison that are obvious. For instance, both wars manifest a strategy against an enemy that is global in scale. Both wars are being fought with U.S. forces on foreign soil. Both wars have a domestic front, mainly political in nature, involving very much a suitable media strategy for propaganda. However, I think the greater interest is in the differences. The war on terrorism enjoys a far greater amount of domestic political support. Furthermore, whereas in the Vietnam War the spectre of a direct threat to the United States was more distant, this time around, homeland security was clearly breached by the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks. This perceived direct threat to national security has provided substantial legitimacy to U.S. military action in Afghanistan, and which is surprisingly being little eroded by the Bush Administration's minor detour to deal with Iraq.

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