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WHY VIETNAM?

The tragedy called the Vietnam War has run its course. The United States poured into it eight years of effort, the lives of 50,000 of our finest young men, the good health of another 300,000, $150 billion of our hard-earned tax money, and the honor and prestige of our nation.

It is easy to see why the Soviets wanted to keep the war going. While we spent $150 billion on weapons that are now down the drain in Vietnam, the Soviets spent an equivalent amount on nuclear weapons to control the world.

The result is that our weapons are gone, our nation is militar ily and financially weakened, and our morale is at an all-time low. In contrast, the Soviets (whom President Ford so tactfully referred to as our "adversary") have an arsenal of the latest nuclear weapons and are bursting with the exhilaration of victory.

Why did our leaders keep the war going for eight years, and then take bankruptcy on our investment there?

Was it because we couldn't win the war? It is ridiculous even to suggest that the great United States couldn't defeat little North Vietnam in eight years -- when we totally destroyed the mighty German and Japanese war machines in only three and a half years.

There were so many ways we could have won the war in Vietnam years ago. We could have mined the harbor of Haiphong, knocked out the dredge in the harbor that was essential to its use, destroyed

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North Vietnam's dams and dikes, and bombed the important military targets. Our top military men said that the war could have been won in three weeks with conventional weapons, if they were only permitted to do so.

But our military men did not make the vital decisions about the war or even about selection of targets. For the first four years, they were made by President Johnson and Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, who once said that he would be proud to have it called "McNamara's war."

Why did Nixon and Kissinger keep the war going for four more years, and then agree to a phony truce in Paris on the same disastrous terms that they could have gotten the day Nixon went into office?

The answer is that Henry Kissinger determined that our priority goal must be detente with the Soviet Union -- a fragile relationship built on the quicksand of U S. military weakness and economic bribes to the Soviets, such as long-term low-interest loans.

Both the goal and the means of attaining it were anathema to the majority of what might be called the Nixon constituency. To keep those conservatives and Middle Americans in line behind the policy of detente, Kissinger needed the image of being anti-Communist. The Vietnam **War** was the perfect ploy.

Those who voted for Nixon in 1972 concluded that, if the Nixon Administration was fighting the Communists in. Southeast Asia, and making speeches against the antiwar radicals at home, it surely could be relied upon to protect U.S. interests in dealing with the Soviets.

Now that the Kissinger peace in Vietnam has ended in disaster, it is time to take a good hard look at the possibility that his detente with the Soviet Union may end in a similar disaster for America.

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