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The War That Won't Go Away

William Colby ["Vietnam After McNamara," op-ed, April 27] has created a fictional cover story that Robert McNamara's war was lost but Mr. Colby's war could have been won except for a pusillanimous Congress. The facts are otherwise.

The South Vietnamese army in the last stages of the war was corrupt, overextended and had little support among the people because of its wanton killing policies. Its leadership sold ammunition and oil received from the Pentagon on the black market. The Pentagon and President Nixon said that the South Vietnamese army (ARVN) was overstuffed with military hardware, and the Pentagon did not challenge a \$300 million cutback (to \$700 million) for military aid in fiscal 1975.

Operation Phoenix—which Mr. Colby directed—killed 20,000 villagers, guerrillas and sympathizers, and it incarcerated countless bystanders who had to pay bribes to be released. Phoenix was unsuccessful in the cities, but did have success in the villages by weakening the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese army.

But even with this minor tactical "success" (and moral outrage that must surely haunt Mr. Colby), the peasant class faced ruination by 1974 because of worldwide inflation and the misallocation of resources within the Thieu government. As Robert Komer, a more realistic pacification program director, put it, the United States was never able to translate tactical "successes" into "positive and active rural popular support for the Government of Vietnam."

The Lam Son campaign into Laos in February 1971 was a good example of the South Vietnamese armed forces' actual fighting capability, which Mr. Colby praises. Thousands of ARVN soldiers were killed, and most of their armored vehicles were destroyed—along with hundreds of American helicopters.

The South Vietnamese army's status did not improve after the 1973 peace agreement was signed in Paris. The side assurances that President Nixon sent through his emissary, Vice President Spiro Agnew, to South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu were in direct conflict with the agreement. And while Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Mr. Nixon might have wanted to bail out their client with more terror bombings or the re-introduction of American troops, it was too late. Mr. Nixon and Mr. Agnew foundered on their own character deficits and corruption and were driven from office.

A great nation's leaders must have prudence, a moral center, an understanding of the limits of power, an objective comprehension of one's own history and another nation's point of view. A democratic nation's leadership must know the difference between real interests, imperial meddling, metaphors such as "falling dominoes" and reality. Its leadership must respect international law, international procedures and the Nuremberg judgments. Why Mr. Colby persists in his public alibi, rather than at the very least joining Mr. McNamara in a limited hang-out confession, is beyond comprehension.

MARCUS RASKIN

Distinguished Fellow
Institute for Policy Studies
Washington

William Colby's op-ed article on the Vietnam War provided me with one of life's little treasured moments. He asserts with regret that it was the War Powers Resolution (and the mood in Congress) that deterred President Gerald Ford from massively intervening in Vietnam in 1975 to turn back the North Vietnamese onslaught.

As a staff member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee at the time the resolution was crafted and passed, I can attest that its purpose was to prevent exactly the outcome Mr. Colby seems to have desired. By doing so, the resolution probably helped end the Vietnam War months or even years earlier than if the United States had continued to prop up the Thieu regime through armed force.

In the ensuing two decades plus, the resolution frequently has been criticized from both the left and right, and too often has been honored in the breach. But it remains on the books

and perhaps may prevent a future misadventure by U.S. political leaders. In any case, the War Powers Resolution obviously helped bring an end to at least one tragic chapter of American history. Thanks to Mr. Colby for the testimonial.

JOHN H. SULLIVAN
Arlington

William Colby's article came as a breath of fresh air after the prevailing nonsense that has been written in the wake of Robert McNamara's book. The criticism generally leveled at Mr. McNamara—to the effect of, "Now he tells us!"—reflects the general ignorance about what transpired after Mr. McNamara left the Cabinet.

I served in Vietnam with the U.S. Embassy-USAID Joint Economic Office from October 1968 to the evacuation in April 1975, and I can attest to the truth of Mr. Colby's assertions. By 1971 Viet Cong activity had been reduced to nuisance proportions even as U.S. forces had essentially withdrawn. As Mr. Colby says, this is precisely why the North Vietnamese attacked with regular forces across the DMZ. Even then, the North Vietnamese could have been contained and the war won had not Congress pulled the rug out with reductions, and finally the termination, of aid appropriations.

Mr. McNamara can legitimately regret his role in an endeavor that ultimately failed at terrible cost. But his regret should have been focused on the ineffective policies of the early years for which he was himself largely responsible. It is a great shame that his self-centered ramblings should have lent credence to the myth that the war was unwinnable.

RICHMOND ALLEN
McLean

When Ginger Rogers Sold War Bonds

I thoroughly enjoyed The Post's entertaining and informative Style feature article and obituary of Ginger Rogers [April 26]. But except for the passing allusion to her love of country, The Post's writers missed a small but important (at least to her) aspect of her long, charmed life. Like many other Hollywood stars, she strongly supported the promotion of U.S. Savings Bonds during and after World War II. I know this not only from written history but also from personal recollection.

Some 50 years ago, my father, the

late Evo De Concini, was chairman of the U.S. Savings Bonds Volunteer Committee for Southern Arizona, and Ginger Rogers came on the Southern Pacific Railroad from Los Angeles to Tucson for the kickoff rally he had organized. Her presence helped make it a big success. Afterward, my brother Dennis and I wondered if our mother was ever jealous when she looked at the glossy photo of Evo and Ginger, she kissing him (patriotically) on the cheek, which he kept pinned on his closet door for years.

Indeed, she loved her country and did her part to preserve it.

DINO De CONCINI
Washington