

Post 2/10/76

Oliver Stone's 'Disinformation' War

In his vicious attack on Henry Kissinger [letters, Jan. 31], Oliver Stone has graphically proved the central assertion made by many critics of his film "Nixon"—namely, that his purpose was not to enlighten people about the 37th president but instead to spread disinformation about the central events of Mr. Nixon's public life, especially the war in Vietnam.

The goal of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger was to withdraw American forces from Vietnam in a manner that would permit the non-communist government in Saigon to defend itself and to deter Hanoi's persistent aggression. Winning the war by defeating North Vietnam militarily was never the issue. The issue was preserving the freedom of a population in South Vietnam on behalf of which 3 million young Americans, including Mr. Stone, ultimately fought and 58,000 died.

In January 1973, when the Paris peace accords were signed, a framework had been created within which these goals could have been achieved. When Saigon fell a little more than two years later, it was not because of any deficiencies in the agreement or in the army of South Vietnam. By the spring of 1973, the Watergate crisis had deprived President Nixon of the political authority he would have needed to use airstrikes to block Hanoi's violations of the accords. Meanwhile Congress slashed aid to Saigon so brutally that by 1975 it was pathetically outgunned by Soviet-supplied forces in the north. Mr. Stone's feverish "beast" metaphors, his unintentionally comic depiction of Richard Nixon and indeed all the frantic revisionism of surviving elements of the '60s left cannot mask the fact that Saigon fell because the United States, weary after a decade of war, lost interest in keeping its promises.



FROM THE MOVIE 'NIXON'

President Nixon went to his grave believing that the greatest tragedy brought about by Watergate was the defeat of South Vietnam, which weakened America's faith in itself and plunged Indochina into two decades of poverty, totalitarianism and, in Cambodia, genocide. He was aware of his responsibility in these events. Oliver Stone was an acknowledged supporter of an anti-war movement that heartened Hanoi and undoubtedly contributed to the skepticism about Saigon that was at the heart of the U.S. failure to back up the Paris peace accords. Perhaps it is time for Mr. Stone and others who protested against the war to consider the role they played in hastening the conquest of South Vietnam and ensuring that those who fell defending it would indeed have died in vain.

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