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## OBSERVER

WASHINGTON, May 17 — Every time some high-standing politician utters that line about our not even wanting anything in return for all the fighting we have done in Vietnam and all the money we have spent out there, somebody ought to stand up in the audience and cry, "Why not?"

Wars make sense if you are attacked, but fighting a war out of pure high-grade unadulterated surpassing moral excellence is simply bad policy.

It also makes for very cruel wars. Something about fighting for the sake of goodness seems to sharpen an army's thirst for butchery. It is probably the conviction implicit in such wars that the more people you kill, the more you elevate the moral tone of the public situation.

This consideration, however, is incidental to the point, which is that expecting some spoils from war is not so terrible a thing as we make it sound, and is probably preferable to making war for uplift. If we had gone into the Vietnam war with gain in mind, we should probably have been out of it years ago, to the profit of everybody.

For one thing, the Vietnamese might have understood us. Having lived with the French for a century, they could have coped with another exploiter who wanted to drain their country for wealth. The example of their defeating the French might have persuaded us that they could also make the price higher for us than the goods were worth. We might not even have bothered to risk the Yankee reputation where the wily French had failed.

Instead we came to do good. We would help them avoid Red Satan's claws, make them part of "the free world," give them the Constitution of the United States, parliamentary government, and the works of Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln, whence flowed shopping malls, high-rise office buildings, drive-in hamburger stands and all the rest of it. Democracy!

How baffling it must have seemed to them, seeing these extollers of capitalism with its belief in the moral superiority of greed telling them that nothing was wanted, no land, no wealth, in return for the goodness to be granted. How that confusion must

have been compounded as they watched us proceed to destroy their country out of high moral purpose.

The Romans would have thought our policy absurd. When Rome went to war, it was to get something out of it. Those famous Roman highways were not built because the Romans felt an obligation to bring the blessings of rapid transit to barbaric lands. They simply made it quicker to get the loot back to Rome.

The British operated on the same principle. Good government, of course, followed the Roman conquest, just as Christianity and good railroads followed the British. Stable nations are more easily exploited than the disorderly; good government and Christianity brought stability to the conquered. Roman highway and British railroad hastened the booty's progress to Rome and London.

By many tests their system was also successful for the countries they exploited. Not many politicians in Washington would agree aloud with that proposition. "Imperialism" and "colonialism" are bad words in contemporary political cant, even though one consequence of Rome's was Britain, and one consequence of Britain's was the United States. (Purists at demagoguery, of course, will say this simply proves the evil of the system.)

The American system—fighting wars to improve the moral tone of the world—ought to be abandoned. As professed believers in the moral excellence of the commercial principle, we should go back to the sensible Roman-British policy. Next time, let us hear no talk about not wanting anything at all from war—nothing but a better class of government in the world.

Next time, let everybody know it: If we go in with guns, we expect to get something out of it. To get plenty out of it, in fact. With this approach we can base our decisions about war-making on calculations similar to those we use when deciding whether to buy new plant, or to merge with Consolidated, and at that sort of thing we are pretty good.

As enforcers of moral excellence we are embarrassing, to put it as mildly as possible.