

Peace With Honor

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NEW YORK—Now that the last of our prisoners and fighting men finally have returned home from Vietnam, today seems an appropriate time to pause in our elation to consider what has been accomplished and—more particularly—what may happen next in that war-ravaged land.

President Nixon, in his eloquent televised speech to the nation on Thursday night, outlined with justified pride what he and the nation have done in the last four years of our 12-year military involvement.

He pointed out, properly, that despite all the frustrating handicaps imposed by his enemy-aiding critics, he has succeeded in his personal vow to withdraw our forces peaceably and with their honor intact.

Far more significant, as he noted, is the fact that the cease-fire reached between the United States and the Communist invaders marked fulfill-



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ment of an idealistic commitment which no other nation on earth would have honored at such cost to itself.

"We have prevented the imposition of a Communist government by force on South Vietnam," he said. "Never have men served with greater devotion abroad with less apparent support at home."

All of which is true. The U.S. has indeed achieved the "peace with honor" sought for so long by the President—a formal peace agreement obtained after halting the mass invasion of a helpless country and leaving that country with all the training and military hardware it needs to protect itself.

Unfortunately, as the President himself was forced to add, what we have seems to be a peace whose terms have been lived up to in general by the enemy only so far as our prisoners are concerned.

It is a peace signed by an enemy to whom the concept of national honor has little meaning, men who regard power as all important and treaties as mere tools in diplomatic maneuvering for eventual achievement of their real goals.

Even more unfortunately, these same conditions and attitudes seem to prevail in the government of the country for which we have sacrificed so much.

It is this combination of facts—and the little-understood reasons for them—that call for more understanding if we are not to be disillusioned by possible future events.

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NOW I CERTAINLY DON'T WANT to throw any cold-water on the situation or our part in it. We went into this thing to assure the right of a long-suffering people to choose their own government without outside interference—and we were true to our word to our everlasting credit.

An enormously complicating factor, however, is the extreme cultural gap which exists between Western societies and the rest of the world—a gap so large that one group frequently doesn't really understand what the other means, though the words are understood.

We have all noted, for example, how Communists refer to enslavement as "liberation," or their dictatorship as a "people's democracy." What is less known is that our Christian ideals of inviolable international law and organization have no basic validity for leaders who consider the conference table as the extension of a battlefield—or for people whose sole idea of good government is the one which interferes not at all in their lives.

This point is touched upon in a fascinating new book, "The Storm Has Many Eyes," written by my long-time friend, Henry Cabot Lodge, who was our ambassador to Saigon in 1963-64, and again in 1965-67. Here is how he explains many common misconceptions about Vietnam:

"My view (as ambassador) was that the people of South Vietnam had a right to exist independently of North Vietnam . . . (but) the North wanted to conquer the South. I thought from the beginning that an exclusively military solution to the problem was impossible.

"It is important never to forget that South Vietnam is a land without a Western democratic tradition. It did not occur to most Vietnamese that an election was a good way to decide an important problem. The Confucianist tradition, founded on the idea of respect for the ruler, holds that a ruler stays in office and gets respect as long as he deserves it. In their tradition, a coup was the acceptable way to get a change.

North Vietnam, on the other hand, under Chinese and Russian influence, had become an efficiently authoritarian police state in modern dress, governed with iron control by a small group of determined men. About the only thing in common, governmentally speaking, is that neither Vietnam is a Western democracy."

For a fuller explanation of what this can and has meant to us your attention is called to certain perceptive writings I have been reading recently by Mrs. Adda B. Bozeman, who is Professor of International Relations at Sarah Lawrence College and one of the most brilliant women I have ever had the privilege of knowing.

The main thrust of a paper written by Dr. Bozeman entitled "Law and Foreign Policy" is that the concept of law as held by Western culture is virtually unknown in cultures motivated by such principles as religion, local ethics, social traditions or political forces which use law for its protection, not its people.

"Law," she writes, "is not uniformly accepted in the multicultural modern world whether as a major value, a basic norm, or a symbolic language. It ought not to be viewed (by us) as a mainstay of foreign policy-making."

In other words, don't assume that everyone means the same thing by signing a piece of paper, or that you can apply your laws to them and expect it to mean anything.

In one of her many books, entitled "The Future of Law in a Multicultural World," Dr. Bozeman explores this subject at great length. Only a very few pertinent quotes can be reproduced here:

"The convergence of Asian traditions of statecraft on the idea that politics is war and diplomacy the art of deliberate make-believe or deceit is amply documented.

"The records of the present and the past do not suggest that law will be the basic principle or political organization in Southeast Asia, or that peace and respect for the territorial integrity of the states will be dominant ideals. Conflict is a way of life there, perhaps even a major principle of organization.

"There is false sense of moral unity in the Western disposition to identify meaningful accords with firm contractual commitments. This is likely to be illusory, firstly because this form of obligation is not a transculturally valid norm, and secondly because it is more difficult today than it was in an exclusively occidental state system to know just what sovereignty and independence mean, and how credible and durable any accord is likely to be.

"Under the impact of these developments, war and peace can no longer be viewed as polarized, mutually exclusive conditions. Indeed, the most that can be said of peace today—whether contemplated as a concept or as a political reality—is that it denotes a situation where conflict is controlled."

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THE QUOTES which have been offered here on what could be called the conflict between "law" and "lore" are certainly revealing when applied to the situation in Vietnam.

While it is true that the U.S. has achieved its own "peace with honor," it would appear that both North and South Vietnam — far from desiring a real peace — have never expected to stop fighting each other.

I don't want to sound like a pessimist. It is, after all, POSSIBLE that they really have decided to settle their differences politically rather than militarily. But it seems increasingly doubtful.

President Nixon, meanwhile, has warned that he will take drastic steps to insure that Hanoi doesn't go too far in its illegal infiltration of the South.

This presumably would mean resumption of a congressional challenge of his power to do so. I earnestly hope they don't provoke him, as he's shown that he doesn't make a threat lightly.

However, the American people have had it up to here with Vietnam.

And so have I.