

Miller, Robert Hopkins. *Vietnam and Beyond, A Diplomat's Cold War Education*. Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2002.

Robert Miller's varied and significant State Department career, which spanned 40 years of the Cold War (1951-91), is the directing force of his narrative. *Vietnam and Beyond* highlights both the continuity and the changes that defined the era's foreign policy in general and the author's personal odyssey in particular. Though Miller's work as an American Foreign Service officer led him to participate in the NATO buildup in the 1950s, presidential travel and summitry, and the Congo crisis of the 1960s, his book is distinctly focused on the Vietnam War, which consumed his professional and personal life through much of the 1960s and 1970s.

Miller was a moderate optimist on Vietnam when he became a political officer at the American embassy in that country in 1962. While he was skeptical of consistently positive evaluations of military progress, he was equally skeptical of those who argued that the United States was supporting a corrupt and inept government that was unable to capture the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people. Miller was also convinced that most of South Vietnam did not desire communism, that Hanoi's aggression posed a significant threat to America's security, and that the failure to meet this challenge would damage America's global credibility. In the discussion of his time in Vietnam, Miller describes the complexity of American efforts to sustain the nation, the pressure that he and others were under to show the current administration's successes, and the increasing difficulties of achieving legitimacy and progress in the chaos initiated after the removal of President Diem in 1963. Each of these factors contributed to Miller's growing skepticism.

After being injured in the 1965 terrorist attack on the American embassy in Saigon, Miller was transferred to Washington and became director of the State Department's Vietnam Working Group. His narrative emphasizes the changes that occurred as he became acquainted with a different war, "the bureaucratic war, the war of the media, the war of protest demonstrations, frustration, fatigue, and doubt." As the conflict in Vietnam grew increasingly destructive and progress stagnated, Miller's opinions began to diverge further from official US policies. He argued to his superiors in the State Department that American aid was negating South Vietnamese desire to take control of their own future, that South Vietnamese leaders ought to be pushed harder to broaden their domestic support base, and that US involvement in Vietnam now exceeded any possible national interest there. However, the American foreign policy elite continued to believe that de-escalation would mean a defeat in the perceived battle against monolithic communism. Miller argues that it was the momentum of this Cold War thinking which both maintained and escalated the war. Indeed, the changing (and often increasingly negative) perceptions of those working on the lower rungs of the bureaucratic ladder were easily marginalized. "In fact, at my level we had no influence, no way of helping the ship of state to change course." Miller later served with the American delegation to the Paris peace talks, which he argues were frequently ineffectual and were drawn out for far too long while human

costs increased. Since most of the published documents concerning decision- making processes on Vietnam are focused on the perspectives of the upper echelon of government, Miller's narrative is significant because it provides a window into the viewpoints and dilemmas of those charged with the State Department's daily operations.

After the war, Miller held various posts within the State Department and served as an ambassador to several nations. Despite his intimate association with the American failure in Vietnam, Miller is at pains to emphasize the continuity of his (and America's) overarching goals and beliefs about foreign policy during the Cold War. Having begun his career in 1951 with the desire to help further the American objectives of rebuilding Europe and Japan, dissolving European colonial empires, and dismantling the Soviet empire, Miller could reflect upon his 1991 retirement that these goals had been satisfactorily achieved.

By providing a first-hand account of the State Department's role in Vietnam, and by utilizing the recently declassified records (including his own) of middle ranking as well as senior officers, Miller's book provides an authoritative and enlightening insider's perspective on the operational dynamic, goals, and failures of America's Cold War foreign policy that will be valuable to scholars, diplomats, and interested laymen alike.

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