EDWIN A. MARTINI

Invisible Enemies: The American War on Vietnam, 1975–2000

Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press (Culture, Politics, and the Cold War Series), 2007. Pp. xii + 280. $80 (cloth).

Focused squarely on the United States, this historical study begins with the provocative premise that there was a postwar war conducted actively by Washington against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV). This war, of course, was not a military affair but had to do with economic, cultural, and political aspects. In Edwin Martini's narrative, the new war was just as hostile against the unified Vietnamese state. It commenced as early as May 1975 with the imposition of economic sanctions by the Ford White House and continued with Jimmy Carter's and Ronald Reagan's generally favorable policies towards China and the Khmer Rouge and, correspondingly, averse ones towards the SRV.

The support and pressure the White House received from congressional members, such as Representative Stephen Solarz, and from political groups, such as the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia, kept alive the POW/MIA issue. These lobbies contributed largely to US policies regarding the SRV. The White House and Congress were pressed, for instance, to maintain the economic embargo against Vietnam. Reinforcing the diplomatic hostility was a conservative cultural interpretation of US involvement in the Second Indochina War, best exemplified by movies such as *Apocalypse Now*, *Coming Home*, *Platoon*, and the *Rambo* series. These products and their like contributed to the elision of the past war

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by, among other things, rendering the Vietnamese and their suffering invisible in American memory and moral consciousness.

A new stage of this war occurred under the administration of the first George Bush, as the US drew a new road map towards normalizing relations with Vietnam. Among the contributing factors to this change was the tension between the powerful POW/MIA lobby and the increasingly vocal US-Vietnam Trade Council and other pro-business groups. It was the latter that eventually prevailed and helped to secure full diplomatic relations during the Clinton administration. But by no means was it a smooth road: a point firmly underscored in the sections on the 1993 Senate Select Committee and US demand for repayment of debt previously accumulated under the Republic of Vietnam (RVN).

Within the constraints of a US-centered framework, the book offers a good deal of information and insight to scholars of Vietnam Studies. One of the book's strongest points is its emphasis on congressional roles and the highlighting of the erasure of the Vietnamese people in American popular culture during the 1970s and 1980s. Simultaneously, however, it overreaches. In a sense, the book consists of two monographs that appear in alternating chapters. The first, third, and fifth chapters concentrate on US diplomatic and economic policies towards Vietnam. The second, fourth, and sixth chapters discuss the cultural reconstructions noted above, including analysis of popular movies, the comic series *The 'NAM*, and war memorial walls at The National Mall and on the internet.

Although each side of the book is important in its own right and provocative when treated with the other, it is not clear how the cultural affected the diplomatic in this case, or how Hollywood products influenced Washington policies and vice versa. It is also unclear why some examples are singled out for analysis at the exclusion of others: *Platoon* and *Rambo* but not *Full Metal Jacket* and *Casualties of War*, for example, or Solarz's advocacy for the embargo and support of the Khmer Rouge but not for immigration of political prisoners associated with the former RVN. Moreover, since Martini uses 240 pages of text to cover a quarter of a century, the content leaves some topics underdeveloped.

To complement Martini's work, scholars can consult several other recent books that are narrower in topic or time frame. Cultural and political

developments related to war memorial walls, for instance, are well covered in Patrick Hagopian's, *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of Healing* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), and those related to the POW/MIA lobby are covered in Michael J. Allen's, *Until the Last Man Comes Home: POWs, MIAs, and the Unending Vietnam War* (University of North Carolina Press, 2009). There are two monographs on diplomatic bilateral relations that use sources from both sides: Cécile Menétrey-Monchau's, *American-Vietnamese Relations in the Wake of War: Diplomacy After the Capture of Saigon, 1975–1979* (McFarland, 2006), and Lewis M. Stern's, *Defense Relations Between the United States and Vietnam: The Process of Normalization, 1977–2003* (McFarland, 2005), both of which deal mainly with 1994–2000. Along with Martini's *Invisible Enemies: The American War on Vietnam, 1975–2000* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), these works signal an orientation towards considering postwar relations as a continuation of wartime history instead of a separation from it.

Readers might take issue with Martini's use of the notion of warfare to describe the economic, cultural and political stance of the United States toward Vietnam after 1975, but they would be hard-pressed to dispute that the Vietnam war had a considerable impact on the United States' perspective of and relation to Vietnam long after their armed conflict.

Tuan Hoang, University of Notre Dame