

“Lessons from the Cold War: Reading In Retrospect: the Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam in prison”

By Liu Xiaobo

December 28, 1996 – January 2, 1997

Partial translation

The most surprising aspect of this book is not the historical narrative, but rather McNamara's bluntness and honesty, a candor that is particularly characteristic of Americans that is embodied in an uninhibited reflective and critical narrative. The author, as a high-level policymaker (Defense Secretary) during the Vietnam War, could bravely face that history of a wrong war at the wrong time, the wrong place, and executed under the wrong policies and make deep critical reflection on the American government's policy mistakes, communication mistakes, and the author's own personal mistakes.

It was precisely in this 'riding the tiger' dilemma in which it was difficult to move forward or back and the American government could not execute an effective policy, and could only stumble forward until it completely lost domestic support. In a situation of stalemate in the war and an completely ineffective South Vietnamese government, and when domestic opposition to the war was raging and public opinion was changing dramatically, at least the new American administration had a clear policy—it was necessary to remove forces from South Vietnam.

The second lesson this book reaches is that the Cold War's evils had a negative effect on the world. Although from the perspective of today the Soviet Union and communist regimes in Eastern Europe collapsed in the Cold War standoff did have some positive effects, the victory of the liberal system over authoritarianism at the end of the 20th century cannot hide the negative effects. The disastrous consequences of the Cold War were not secondary to the Second World War itself, the expenditures and comprehensive societal resources spent on the arms race, the damage to the spirit of life caused by the clash of ideologies made the world spend a huge price.

During the Cold War, the three major powers of the Soviet Union, China and America paid a huge cost. The author in the concluding section's eleventh lesson is worth the deep consideration of political leaders of the entire world. Given such a great cost, if the result of the Cold War was not the collapse of the Eastern Blocs authoritarian regimes, but was rather a different result, then the Cold War would have been a blunder with a hundred calamities and not a single benefit. When will a high-ranking policy maker in the PRC write such a self-reflective piece?

The reason that the Communist system, which used weapons and lies to sustain itself, ended, is that it was anti-human. No matter the system and culture, if it cannot achieve an acknowledgment from human nature and the soul, it will be impossible for it to continue for a long time. The lies and violence of utopia can only be maintained for a short while. Even though there is the reason of external support, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the East European regimes, and the democratization of Taiwan and South Korea, is fundamentally a result of internal demands and change. It was not the Americans that destroyed Communist authoritarianism, but that was caused by the self-destructive forces of this system's anti-human nature.

China's democratization is also more or less like this. At present, the Chinese Communist regime is already in a process of this self-destruction, the end of the Cold War has created a positive international environment for this kind of prospect, and the key is our own sincerity and efforts. The effect of America and other Western nations is only an external pushing force—a necessary interference based on a model and persuasion—and cannot use forceful pressure. No matter what, an open China is undergoing

rapid change, the pressure of the will of the people, the world's development trends, and international society all encourage China to take the road of democratization.