

Sunday, May 8, 1988

Can a Great Power Be a Great Democracy?

1999

Victory Without War

by Richard Nixon

(Simon & Schuster:

\$19.95; 324 pp.)

Reviewed by Josef Joffe

Have you had it with "Gorby-phoria"? Do you need some solid *Realpolitik* to take you through Inauguration Day when (name your candidate) must turn his heady campaign rhetoric into a strategy for the real world? Then Richard Nixon's "1999" is the book for you.

As you might remember, Nixon left his office prematurely 14 years ago. While any reviewer would hesitate to recommend the former President as a Constitutional authority, Nixon's foreign policy views have always commanded attention, if not respect. As in past books (five since his involuntary retirement), Nixon lays out a useful intellectual antidote to the two classic temptations of American policy.

One is the "Reagan Syndrome," the habit of dividing the world into "evil empires" and lovable democracies where foes must be either reformed or crushed. The other is the "Carter Syndrome" (afflicting Jesse Jackson and, to a lesser degree, Michael Dukakis today), which would deny endemic conflict between nations, pooh-pooh the necessity of force, and substitute the reasonable routines of domestic governance for the rough and tumble of international power politics.

without Communism," Nixon adds, "Russia would still be an expansionist power."

Maybe not an expansionist, but surely a great power—and the only one that poses a deadly threat to the United States; that is the enduring reality at the bottom of any conceivable American strate-

negotiating a permanent settlement." Hence, their only purpose is "to reduce the chance that our differences will erupt into armed conflict." Yet where interests run in parallel (say, blocking the spread of nuclear weapons), mutual agreement should be vigorously pursued.

What *are* American interests? Nixon renders his realist perspective most succinctly in the case of Nicaragua. There, "our interests are not a matter of whether the government in Managua respects human rights and says nice things about the United States. A dictatorship . . . does not threaten American interests per se, and the anti-American rhetoric of a country like Mexico is annoying but harmless. Our interests were engaged only when Nicaragua forged links with the Soviet bloc and became a base for Soviet expansionism in Central America."

Well put, but, alas, not for a great power which is also a great democracy. Nixon's cold-blooded prescription would be perfect for a world where international politics were like global chess. Unfortunately, democracies care more about the pieces than about their lineup. It wasn't Germany's grab for hegemony in 1914 and 1939 that mobilized America, but the nastiness of Kaiser Bill and the sheer evil of Adolf Hitler.

Why does the country agonize about Nicaragua? Because there, "good guys" and "bad guys" move in a world of shadows where the moral issue is not clear-cut, and the Soviet threat remains abstract. To put it more generally, ideals and ideology rather than interest usually move democratic societies. They are good at *comic* battle but don't take well to the subtle game of diplomacy and balance.



Richard Nixon

Benjamin Rush Martin III

The problem need hardly be labored. Jimmy Carter started out by bidding the nation to "lose our inordinate fear of communism" and ended up as fervid Cold Warrior. The Reagan Administration used to bleat about "accelerating the decline of the Soviet Empire," only to end up in a close embrace with Gorbachev while proclaiming disarmament and detente *Über alles*. Needless to say, such an approach does not make for a stable, consistent foreign policy as befits a great power.

Nixon, who all along has been his own Kissinger, would stop all this in the name of *Realpolitik*, a most un-American notion. "Americans," he writes, "tend to believe that conflict is unnatural," yet "international conflict has been a constant throughout history." Whence it follows: "Only when countries have accepted the existence of conflict and sought to manage it through a balance of power have enduring periods of general peace resulted."

What about Gorbachev, the Great White Hope of all good people in the West? "Like his predecessors, Gorbachev seeks to expand the influence and power of the Soviet Union." What if he is truly intent upon reforming the Soviet Moloch? Even if he were to succeed, "reform at home does not automatically lead to restraint abroad." This can hardly be gainsayed; Khrushchev, the great de-Stalinizer, plunged the world into its worst crisis—over Berlin and Cuba—since World War II. "Even

gy. How, then, should the United States deal with its one and only mortal rival?

Nixon keeps insisting that the United States can "win," but this seems more like a figure of speech. He knows full well that "winning" (say, what Rome did to Carthage) has become a meaningless term in the Nuclear Age where victors and losers might end up in mutual destruction. His book is rather a prescription for a world where "the U.S.-Soviet conflict is not a problem but a condition." Problems between nations can be resolved—by defeat, or submission or stable accommodation. Yet a condition like permanent rivalry in the

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shadow of the bomb can only be treated or stabilized.

There must be arms control, but only if it produces more stable balance of restraint. There must be negotiations, but in full view of their limits. Where vital interests clash, "we will never succeed in

Nixon should know. He *had* to conclude a loser's peace in Vietnam because the country could no longer stomach an ambiguous and costly war. He *had* to oversell detente as "stable structure of peace" because a democratic electorate would not otherwise understand, let alone reward, an agreement for merely partial respite—not while a McGovern was preaching the Aquarian gospel of peace, harmony and understanding.

"1999" has not solved the democratic dilemma; indeed, the book purchases intellectual cohesion at the price of ignoring that dilemma. Still, the book ought to be required reading for Bush and Dukakis. Every new American President dreams of recasting the world, yet Carter and Reagan merely careered from one ideological extreme to the other. There is a lesson in this, entitled: "more realism and steadiness, please." Nixon has provided the textbook: a highly intelligent, though sometimes overstated breviary with the implicit subtitle: "How great powers must behave in the real world."

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