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The Perfect War: Technowar in Vietnam

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sanctuaries so provocative, and the addition of weapons like the Tomahawk ("an aimless missile, blundering into the Pacific without a mission") so destabilizing that all talk of manageable war between the super-powers is an exercise in the most insane wishful thinking.

That being the case, what is to be done? Unfortunately the set of prescriptions which Hayes, Bello, and Zarsky advance (the creation of nuclear-free and noninterventionist zones, as well as a reversal of the global nuclear arms race) appear to have been the least well-thought-out part of their analysis. They pay relatively little attention to geographical determinants, the interests of the regional players who are expected to apply equal pressure on the Soviets and the Americans, and the lack of real leverage that nations like Australia (where *American Lake* was first published) have in terms of influencing the super-powers.

These criticisms aside, this extraordinarily detailed account, with encyclopedic tables and appendices, is a very valuable and timely *tour d'horizon* of the evolution and current application of American military strategy in the Asia-Pacific region. While it is anti-American and anti-nuclear in complexion, it is, nevertheless, sanely and powerfully argued. Some readers may feel that the authors have been guilty of the selective use of evidence and of faulty logic in places, but the central thesis is impossible to ignore. By exploding the puffery of nuclear

theories, reducing the Soviet naval threat to its proper proportions, and highlighting the dangerous asymmetries in Soviet and American nuclear power in the Pacific, the authors have done us a very real service.

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Gibson, James W. *The Perfect War: Technowar in Vietnam*. Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986. 508pp. \$19.95

In his book, James William Gibson argues that U.S. involvement in the Vietnam war was planned, organized, and run according to the "basic logic of Technowar, mapping the capitalist production system onto military conduct." Technowar, states Gibson, is the American Defense Establishment's mind-set which "conceives war to be a struggle between two machine-like, technobureaucratic apparatuses." According to Gibson, the United States waged the Vietnam war wholly under the influence of this mind-set, which viewed the North Vietnamese and Vietcong as the technologically inferior foreign "Other" doomed to defeat once Washington decided to engage its technological-production systems against them, utilizing capitalist management principles of production, debit-credit, return on investment, etc.

Gibson's thesis, while containing elements of truth (e.g., the United States *did* rely on its comparative

advantages in technology and material resources; the Defense Department *did* employ management techniques and systems analysis; the U.S. military *did* conduct a war of attrition), suffers from several fatal flaws that render it unpersuasive.

First, the book contains some major factual errors. One of the most blatant is the author's assertion that "the expendability of ground troops be understood as a major structural feature of Technowar." Quite the contrary was true. Avoiding American casualties was a high U.S. priority throughout the war. Another is the contention that General Westmoreland announced the "cross-over-point" (i.e., the point at which enemy forces were being destroyed more rapidly than they could be replaced) had been reached in the spring of 1967, thus implying that Military Assistance Command Vietnam was winning its war of attrition. In reality, Westmoreland explicitly *excluded* the northern provinces comprising I Corps from his estimation. A third is that U.S. "war managers" saw American victory as inevitable in February 1968. These points, and many others made by Gibson in support of his thesis, are simply not true. This brings us to the book's second major flaw: the author's research.

Gibson's Technowar thesis relies wholly on secondary sources for substantiation, with the possible exception of *The Pentagon Papers* which, in one chapter, comprises 47 of the 49 source citations. Indeed, the book

seems to alternate between phases of sole-source explanations of events and history as a compilation of anecdotes: "warrior's knowledge," in the author's words.

Perhaps in recognition of this fact, Gibson devotes an appendix to dismissing some widely acknowledged scholarly works on the war, like Guenther Lewy's *America in Vietnam* and Leslie Gelb's *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked*. Lewy's use of previously classified primary source military records is denigrated as merely a reflection of the truth as "invented" by those in high positions. Gelb is cited as one engaged in "intellectual convolutions" in demonstrating that the war could be viewed as being the product of rational decisions by rational people that produced disastrous consequences. Reliance on official, primary source documentation is thus waived in favor of "the Warrior's Knowledge." Yet, as noted above, Gibson does not hesitate to utilize *The Pentagon Papers* extensively in attempting to support his thesis. The author, it seems, wants to have it both ways.

Finally, there are some basic factual errors that bring into question the accuracy of other supporting data. In one instance, the author has Major General Harry Kinnard assuming command of an artillery brigade. In fact, it was Brigadier General Douglas Kinnard (whose book is cited as the source of Gibson's discussion) who assumed command. Harry Kinnard commanded the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) in Vietnam

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several years prior to this event. Gibson also notes how Harry Summers, in his book, *On Strategy*, frequently cites Lieutenant General Dave Palmer (then a Lieutenant Colonel) when, in fact, he means General Bruce Palmer. President John Kennedy dramatically increased the number of U.S. advisors in 1962, not in 1960 (when Kennedy was a U.S. Senator) as stated by Gibson. Other "facts" such as the Japanese invasion of China in 1939 (it happened in 1937) and Gibson's tirade against the military's "postal exchange" (post exchange) stores, indicate a lack of familiarity with some of the basic history, characters, and institutions the author lambasts under his Technowar thesis.

In sum, *The Perfect War* is a disappointment which, despite its considerable length, provides little insight into America's most divisive war in this century.

ANDREW KREPINEVICH
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Noel, Chris. *Matter of Survival: The War Jane Never Saw*. Boston: Branden Publishing, 1987. 200pp. \$15.95

"Hi Luv, it's Chris Noel . . . welcome to another date with good sounds from the States. . . ." and Armed Forces Radio Transmission Service had its blond bombshell on the airwaves over South Vietnam. For seven years, Chris was the voice, the face, the figure—in a word, the persona—of American womanhood

for the troops fighting in America's longest war. Her memoir mixes remembrance with hindsight in alternating chapters.

Chris Noel's radio broadcasts were a mix of friendly chatter, disc-jockey format, and a few songs that she performed in a little girl voice. Her image was the sexy-but-nice girlfriend, wife, or sister that every soldier, sailor, airman, and marine dreamed about as the stateside daily mail arrived. She was always impeccably groomed—gleaming blond mane, curvy shape in snug sweater, neat miniskirt, white boots, and dazzling smile were her trademarks.

She came out of the sound booth to tour the boondocks of Vietnam like no other show biz personality. Special Forces outposts, base camps, training centers, air bases large and small, rivercraft, aircraft carriers, and hospitals—all were her beat. But she was drawn to the wounded, to the hospitals, where her kindness and beauty was a golden touch amid a world of amputations, mutilation, malaria, and wondering if the folks back home even knew or cared.

Chris Noel became a war casualty herself. She married an Army Special Forces officer who committed suicide after his combat days ended, had a second unsuccessful marriage with a violence-prone adventurer, and endured the scorn of her show biz colleagues, some of whom had actually cheered for a Communist North Vietnamese victory.

The Marilyn Monroe look-alike, who once starred in MGM films with Robert Vaughn, Robert Goulet, Elvis