
An Argument in Favor of the Argument of Gareth Porter on the Misunderstood Primary Goal of the United States' Policy in Asia During the Vietnam War

To what extent do you agree with Gareth Porter (historian & journalist) who argues that the primary goal of the United States' policy in Asia was NOT containing communism in Southeast Asia (Vietnam) or stopping "falling dominos," but rather keeping steady pressure on China. (Porter, A. *Perils of Dominance: Imbalance of Power and the Road to War in Vietnam*. University of California Press, 2005.)

I agree to some extent of his input in regards to the goals of the United States in Asia. Whereas his argument has some merit, I do not think that containing China was the main goal of the United States in Asia. There may have been some intentions of doing so when defining and formulating their foreign policy stances, but there is probably little precedence for them to do so as their primary goal. I would argue that the primary goal of the any sort of involvement in Asia can be attributed to opposing the United States' biggest enemy in the Soviet Union. Many of the proxy wars fought at the time often were to oppose the Soviets and undermine communism in these established regions. For instance, many smaller crises, such as the North Yemen Civil War and the 1958 Lebanon Crisis were strictly proxy wars between the United States and the Soviet Union, China did not even have a significant hand in either of those conflicts. Additionally, China did not have an overbearing foreign policy, and was actually looking to enforce a greater sense of self-dependence and were too busy developing their own nation economically. Although China did have a hand in intervention in regards to Korea and Vietnam, they were not merely as pressing of an issue as the Soviet Union was.

If the United States really wanted to pressure China there would have been a greater incentive to have helped the KMT and the Nationalists during the Chinese Civil War. Warren Cohen, a historian and researcher with association with The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History states: "Although American leaders preferred a Nationalist victory, they did not consider China sufficiently important to intervene in its civil war. Moreover, Marshall, who became secretary of state in 1947, believed the United States, having finite resources, could not afford to invest large sums of money or use millions of American soldiers in an area of secondary concern in the emerging confrontation with the Soviet Union" (Cohen). Marshall's sentiments and the actions of the United States government showed that China was not a big enough issue when the Soviet Union was rising. If China wasn't an issue then, when the United States could have stopped the origins of a communist uprising in China, then it couldn't have been the primary factor in its foreign intervention in Vietnam and Korea. Furthermore, there had always been a

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goal to reestablish relations with China (Kissinger). Putting pressure on China would have been an even greater burden on the United States when they would have to put even bigger pressure on the more daunting Soviet Union.

Whereas, Porter's argument may lend some sort of validity, it does not have sufficient evidence to back up his point. There is overwhelming evidence that Vietnam was fought to suppress Communism as established by many of the American presidents, such as Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson. While pressuring China does come along with the United States' participation in Vietnam and Korea specifically, I don't think I can agree with his stance fully because the United States never expressed avid interest in the Chinese Civil War or helping the Nationalists in Taiwan take over the mainland again. Therefore, to a larger extent, I do not really agree with Porter's argument.

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