

America at the Brink: Rusk, Kissinger, and the Vietnam War

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Machiavellian Moment: A “Machiavellian Moment,” as described by historian J.G.A. Pocock, in his 1975 book of that name, is when a nation faces such internal threats as a corrupt government, or copes with external ones, such as neighboring war-minded countries that threaten the nation’s stability. In Vietnam, the United States encountered just such a moment that stirred a dangerous empire-building impulse, which could have critically damaged its democratic moorings.

In *America At the Brink: Rusk, Kissinger, and the Vietnam War* (Louisiana State University Press, 233 pages, hardcover, \$40.00, 978-0-8071-3179-4) Lawrence W. Serewicz offers an illuminating investigation of how Dean Rusk, secretary of state under presidents Kennedy and Johnson; Henry Kissinger, who held the same position under Richard Nixon; and Lyndon Johnson created and confronted this Machiavellian Moment. Rusk, the idealist, promoted American involvement in Vietnam premised on his view of the United States as a defender of global democracy. Johnson played a dangerous game of power politics as he tried desperately to preserve his “Great Society,” while Kissinger and Richard Nixon forged a more balanced foreign policy based on an awareness America’s limited power.

The author includes some sound caveats for the Bush administration that further show the United States’ role in its global context has yet to be determined and that Machiavellian Moments remain a constant threat.

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