

History: Compare and Contrast Iraq and Vietnam

Literature states fascinating details linking Iraq and Vietnam. It is a common knowledge that Iraq is currently bombarded with numerous issues due to the September 11, 2001 Twin Towers bombing in the United States. Due to the latter, civilians are faced with numerous uncertainties. Questions arise from people around the world. With the current image of Iraq, could the U.S. still afford to hope for international support to deal with anti-Western forces? Is it appropriate to call Iraq as Bush's Vietnam? Would Iraq turn out to be another Vietnam? Is the phrase "history repeating itself" applicable to Iraq compared to Vietnam?

The continuous war in Iraq is branded as a global dilemma. Events in Iraq would affect the U.S. foreign policy severely. This would have lasting consequences although out the globe. Moreover, it would radically change the geopolitical future of the Middle East. US President consistently prompt civilians to be calm while stressing the fact that America's vital national security interests are at stake.

There are outstanding similarities and differences between the two nations. This paper aims to examine the historical events which took place at Iraq and Vietnam. Through the conduct of this analysis, there could be added awareness, enlightenment and comfort to civilians.

Here is a brief discussion of earlier history.

Modern Iraq has a land area approximately equal to Mesopotamia, which is the world's first civilization. The Mesopotamian plain between the two rivers Tigris and Euphrates is part of the Fertile Crescent. Various dynasties and empires ruled the Mesopotamia region such as Sumer, Akkad, Assyria and Babylonia. In 3000 BC, the Sumerian culture flourished. Life at Sumer was shaped by two contradictory factors: the unpredictability of the mentioned rivers possible to unleash devastating floods wiping out the entire populace and extreme richness of the waterway valleys caused by centuries-old deposits of soil.

Vietnam's history dates back more than 4,000 years. From 111 BC to early 10th century, it was under the direct rule of successive dynasties from China. In early 10th century, Vietnam gained autonomy. By 938 AD, it acquired independence.

Based on record, the Vietnam War experience could predict the future war in Iraq. This is the superficial perspective. Via scrutinizing the past, there could be surprising unearthing. Ever since the early U.S. invasion of Iraq, advocates of the war have warned the general public to differentiate this dilemma with the previous wars at Vietnam. Imperative dissimilarities could be pointed out. The latter involves armed forces operations. From a military tactical stance, Vietnam and Iraq have different conflicts.

Following are the noticeable dissimilarities.

First lingers in size and scope. Compared to Iraq, the Vietnam is relatively diminutive. Vietnam War cost the lives of 58,000 American military and estimates of between three and five million

Vietnamese dead, including military and civilian. Thus far the US death toll in Iraq is less than 4,000.

Second is in terms of beginnings. Vietnam started with rebellion. Then, it intensified to typical war. On the other hand, Iraq war began as a predictable invasion. Afterwards, it weakened into a revolutionary known also as guerilla war.

Third, the war operational strategies were vividly different. United States military were deployed to fight with Vietnam and Iraq. The latter was without a charismatic leader epitomizing the civil-military movement for the general public's consumption. Beyond the Middle East borders, there was hardly a support for the rebels. In contrast, Vietnam has National Liberation Front (NLF) which benefited from the sympathy of populace in countless nations inclusive of the United States. However, in 1967 American supporters decreased in number. Iraq's weakening in support has been quicker than predicted. The American public seemed to appraise Iraq with lesser value than Korea and Vietnam. In April 2004, U.S. Senator Edward Kennedy declared that Iraq is George Bush's Vietnam in an interview and speech based in Washington. Bush administration had a hard time determining the trajectory of Iraq's war. Leaders of prestigious organizations including Democrats and Republicans in Congress pressured the US President to pacify Iraq. If the Vietnam War is a guide, fear of the consequences of withdrawal is perchance the most paralyzing factor. The government fears that untimely withdrawal from Iraq would sudden a chaotic and bloody civil war. Nevertheless, the prolonged stay of American military in Iraq promotes disenchanted and possible modification of U.S. foreign policy while the cost of early pull out earlier is comparison to Nixon's respectable intermission.

Fourth, the Cold War ended late in the 20th Century via the collapse of the Soviet Union. This meant that pressure to contain the Soviet Union was gone. US became the world's only Superpower. The tragedy of the late 20th century was that the US did not seize that moment to move the world toward a more rational and humane set of international institutions. Instead, under President Bush, it announced a new world order marked with the Gulf War, the first invasion of Iraq.

Fifth is the US interest in governing Iraq and Vietnam. US have continually had an attention in the Middle East for the reason of oil. With the collapse of the British and French empires after World War II, the US moved into the vacuity. United States pursued the pattern of the British and French which is to break up the Middle Eastern states in order to rule them. The origins of current Iraq War were premeditated while Vietnamese War genesis was accidental.

Sixth is the disparity involving Vietnam and Iraq on the cost of US defeat. Loss from Vietnam, is unimportant for US was not interested in the Asian land mass. Though, defeat from Iraq denotes loss of oil. It would be harder for US to accept losing from Iraq than Vietnam.

Seventh is in terms of enemy confronted. Vietnam was united, supported by the clear majority In Iraq the situation is totally different. There was no unanimity in front opposing the US. Eight lies in the consequences. Vietnam did not have the devastating effects on U.S. power that Iraq is already having.

Ninth is that Vietnam can be instructive about Iraq. Once the U.S. position in Vietnam collapsed, Washington was free to reverse the negative trends it faced in NATO and US. Soviet military balance the world economy, international image and other areas. Only by getting out of Iraq, US

could gain sufficient international support to design a new strategy for limiting the burgeoning growth of anti-Western forces it has unleashed in the Middle East and Southwest Asia.

Last difference was the draft. Every young American male faced the chance of seeing combat. The recruit fell most heavily on the underclass of the US such as farm youth, urban minorities and working poor. As the war dragged on and the death rate rose, whatever patriotic support had existed earlier vanished. Late in the war Nixon ended the conscription and subsequently withdrew American troops from combat. The last two years of the war were largely US air strikes.

In Vietnam's Cold War, North was supported by the People's Republic of China and Soviet Union, while the South was supported by the United States. In March 1973 the war ended with millions of Vietnamese fatalities and American. The reunified Vietnam suffered additional internal oppression and global isolation due to the continuing Vietnamese invasion at Cambodia. In 1986, the Communist Party of Vietnam altered its economic policy and began reforms.

The Vietnam War had three stages. To compare, War in Iraq has already concluded an analogous initial phase, approaching end of the second, and showing signs of proceeding to third. Below are the resemblances of Iraq and Vietnam in terms of war phases and others.

First phase in Vietnam lasted from 1961 until the Congress passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution in August 1964, authorizing deployment of large U.S. combat forces in South Vietnam. It began with hesitation and a gross misreading of American strategic interests. It concluded with the U.S. use of phony intelligence that made it seem that North Vietnamese patrol boats had attacked U.S. ships in the Tonkin Gulf without provocation. Between 1963 and 1967, South Vietnam became

extremely unstable as no government could sustain authority. The Communist-run NLF extended their operation and scored some significant military triumphs. In 1965, US President Lyndon Johnson decided to deploy troops to South Vietnam for security purposes. Bombings of North Vietnam proliferated. US assumed that if South Vietnam fell to the Communists; Southeast Asian countries would follow, this is the Domino Theory. President Kennedy was ambivalent about deeper involvement with the war. As a result, a reduced amount of attention was given to the emerging Sino-Soviet split in the early 1960s.

The containment of China was employed by US as strategic purpose means the forbidding the Soviet Bloc to expand in this region. In 1965, Soviet leaders push through the containment of China and other countries. Ho Chi Minh also sought after the said strategy.

Johnson administration used an apparent North Vietnamese attack on U.S. ships in the Gulf of Tonkin, coast of North Vietnam in 1964. This was to convince Congress to support U.S. military positioned at South Vietnam. U.S. special operations incursions into North Vietnam by Navy Seals played a role in prompting North Vietnamese gun boat actions. Thus, a misleading interpretation of the known facts such as the intelligence assessment of these events became the critical factor in making it America's war, not just Saigon's. In 1969, Ho Chi Minh passed away and wished to be cremated. However, the Communist Party embalmed his body for public display and built a Mausoleum on Ba Đình Square in Hanoi

In Iraq, stage one appeared similar from the run-up to the invasion. Menacing on the necessity to overthrow Saddam's regime were perceived earlier although signs of action appeared in January 2002. This time President Bush proclaimed his alliance of opposing Iraq, Iran, North Korea and

countries his administration accused of acquiring weapons of mass destruction and supporting anti-US terrorists. This turned out to be his rationale for invading Iraq.

In 1980, Saddam Hussein launched the bloody Iran-Iraq War from 1980 to 1988 with inconclusive end and devastated the economy. Iraq declared victory in 1988 achieving the largest military establishment in the Persian Gulf region but with huge debts and an ongoing rebellion by Kurdish elements in the northern mountains. The government suppressed the rebellion by threatening on civilians.

The U.S. invasion opened the way for al Qaeda cadres to enter Iraq. American murders in Iraq was easier after 9/11 bombing. In addition, deposing Arab leader was Osama Bin Laden's ultimate priority. America was down his list. His objective in the long struggle was to disseminate the version of radical Islamic rule to Arab states. Aftermath the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001, American foreign policy called for the eradication of the Ba'ath government in Iraq.

The Iraq Liberation Act of 1998 is the official US policy which kept Iraq from complying with UN sanctions. Unofficial US policies were aimed to strip Saddam Hussein of power. After the US terrorist attacks, regime change became official policy. The supposed links between Saddam Hussein and Al-Qaeda were later found erratic by the 9/11 commission.

Phase two in Vietnam was marked by a refusal to reconsider the war's strategic rationale. Rather, the debate focused solely on war tactical issues. By 1965, U.S. military operations became dreadful. In the end of March 1968, public opinion was anti-war and Johnson did not run for re-election. His allies in the Congress and pro-war New York Times reversed that summer. During this chapter, no American politician dared to re-examine the containing of China. As an

alternative, arguments focused on the ways the war was fought: merciless operations, deaths, and appeasement efforts. Obsession with tactical concerns made it easier to disregard the strategic blunder. As time passed, costs soared, casualties increased, and public approval chop down.

On the other hand, phase two in Iraq disclosed matching strategic denial error prevails today. Reconstruction is insufficient. Not enough troops are available. In March 2003, nations invaded Iraq. On 23 May 2003, the UN Security Council unanimously approved a resolution lifting all economic sanctions against Iraq. As the country struggled to rebuild after three wars and a decade of sanctions, it was racked by violence between a growing Iraqi insurgency and occupation forces. Saddam Hussein was captured on December 13, 2003. Jay Garner was replaced in May 2003 by L. Paul Bremer. The latter was replaced by John Negroponte in April 2004.

Phase three in Vietnam was marked by Vietnamization, policies still ignoring the strategic realities since the war began. Wind-down in Vietnam started in Johnson's last year of office, but Richard Nixon implemented it slowly. Rather than a rapid pullout, he pursued two strategies. First was turning the war over to South Vietnam's military so that U.S. forces could withdraw. By 1972 most of them were gone. Second, negotiations in Paris through Soviet intermediaries with the North Vietnamese began. At the same time, Nixon was pressuring both Hanoi and Saigon to sign the Paris Peace Agreement of 1973 so that American military forces could withdraw from Vietnam. The pressure to Hanoi materialized with the Christmas Bombings in 1972.

In South Vietnam, Nguyễn Văn Thiệu vocally opposed any agreement with the Communists, in spite of that was threatened with withdrawn American aid. Despite the peace treaty, the North

continued the war as had been envisioned by Lê Duẩn and the South still tried to recapture lost territories. In the U.S., Nixon resigned after the Watergate scandal. South Vietnam was seen as losing a strong backer. Under U.S. President Gerald Ford, the Democratic-controlled Congress became less willing to provide aid to South Vietnam. The key problem in South Vietnam had permanently been attaining political consolidation amongst anti-Viet Cong elites. As South Vietnamese military units became more effective, their commanders competed aggressively for political power, assuring a feeble dictatorial regime in Saigon.

It was believed that Moscow would abet the United States reach a settlement short of absolute surrender. By the late 1960s, the war weakened NATO via the depreciation of US dollars in international exchange rates and making the charge of imperialism realistic to citizens. Thus, Soviet leaders had no purpose to help United. Second, Moscow could not have compelled North Vietnamese leaders in Paris to accept half a loaf in South Vietnam. Hanoi was playing off Moscow and Beijing with no intention of surrendering its ultimate goal for any price. The war ended with the abject failure of policies. As helicopters evacuated the American Embassy in Saigon in 1975, illusions vanished.

Phase Three in Iraq is only beginning. Early signs were apparent in the presidential election campaign of 2004. Both Bush and Kerry put full confidence in Iraqization. U.S. forces would stand down while Iraq military having the opposite. They differed only on who could train more Iraqis faster. Nor would they acknowledge that political consolidation had to come before military consolidation, as the Vietnam experience demonstrated. A few days after the 11 March 2004 Madrid attacks, the conservative government of Spain was voted out of office.

Here are more updates on both countries in early 2000 to present.

Soon after the decisions to withdrawal in the Spring of 2004, Dominican Republic, Honduran, Guatemala, Kazakhstan, Singapore, Thailand, Portugal, Philippines, Bulgaria, Nicaragua and Italy left. Other nations such as Australia, Denmark and Poland continued their allegiance to Iraq. On 28 June 2004, the occupation was formally ended by the U.S. led coalition, which transferred power to an interim Iraqi government led by Prime Minister Iyad Allawi. On July 2004, the Philippines ordered the withdrawal of all of its troops in Iraq in order to comply with the demands of terrorists holding Filipino citizen Angelo de la Cruz as a hostage. Many nations that have announced either withdrawal or reconsideration plans if UN is granted more authority in Iraq.

Iraqi government has officially requested the assistance American troops. On January 30, 2005, the transitional parliamentary elections took place.

By the end of 2006 violence continued as the new Iraqi government struggled to extend complete security within Iraq. U.S. forces with decreased number of coalition forces remained in Iraq. An increasingly disturbing trend had arisen, sectarian hostility. As the country attempted to move from occupation by western forces to a new entity within the Middle East, a new phase of conflict seemed too blown up within Iraq. This new segment of conflict was waged predominately along religious sectarian lines. Fighting was primarily between the majority Shia and the minority Sunni. To observers in Iraq, the violence was disturbing. Developments came faster than analysis. Reported acts of violence conducted by an uneasy tapestry of Sunni militants steadily increased by the end of 2006. These attacks become predominately aimed at Iraqi civilians rather than coalition forces. The most broadly reported evidence of this argument stemmed from the February 23, 2006 attack on the Askari Mosque in Samarra, one of Shi'ite

Islam's holiest sites. Analysis of the attack suggested that the Mujahideen Shura Council and Al-Qaeda in Iraq were responsible. The motivation was to provoke forth violence by outraging the Shia population. In response to attacks, violent reprisal escalated. Shia militia organizations associated with various factions of the majority sect of Shia Islam within Iraq gained increasing power and influence in the Iraqi government.

In late 2006, militias had the capability to act outside the scope of government. There were leading retaliation acts of aggression against the Sunni minority. A series of violence consequently proceed whereby Sunni insurgent or terrorist attacks followed with Shia reprisals, regularly in the form of Shi'ite death squads that killed Sunnis. Many observers on the Iraq War began by end of 2006, to refer to this violent amplification as a civil war. By the end of 2006, violence continued as the new Iraqi government struggled to extend complete security within Iraq. With the execution of former President of Iraq Saddam Hussein, the nation of Iraq moves into a new and indefinite period of its history.

As for Vietnam, to date is a greener pasture. It started with an undeniable degree of political dialogue tolerated leading to heated debates on Internet media on the pace the country toward democracy and national reconciliation in premature 2000s. Overseas Vietnamese were favored faster reform toward multi-party election as a mean to curb corruption and social injustice. Others still preferred a slow pace to maintain political and economic stability. These groups were willing to accept the lack of certain civil rights and democratic processes. People who disagreed with the party became more vocal inside the country; some were allowed to lead a relatively normal life while several were harassed by police by placing under surveillance and imprisonment. The security apparatus was susceptible about attempts by ethnic minorities to

form secession movements. Political parties, private news media and independent religious churches were not being permitted by the government. Censorship authority prohibits certain books or songs based on the background of the author or the composer. Most published materials or media from overseas Vietnamese communities were not allowed to circulate. Many apolitical songs from pre-1975 South Vietnam were on the forbidden list. These were used ordinarily at nightclubs and small concerts.

In the mid-2000s, strikes by workers in foreign companies broke out without the guidance of the state-sanctioned labor union. Usually, remote area populace staged protests to insist investigation of local corruption or illegal seizure of land by local officials. This period saw the emergence of overseas Vietnamese communities in places like Taiwan, South Korea, the Middle East and Southeast Asian countries.

In 2006, APEC summit was held in Hanoi, Vietnam. The country is progressing economically and adopting a transparent as well as decentralized governing method. Poverty ratio in Vietnam had fallen rapidly. It is still however relatively poor country. In a list of 177 countries, Vietnam's Human Development Index climbed from being 120 in 1995 to 108 in 2005. Export grew strongly at 20% per year, emphasizing on producing cheap goods for Western markets. Moreover, Vietnam became a member of the World Trade Organization in 2006.

In conclusion, there are certainly superficial and profound parallelisms as well as differences between the Vietnam and Iraq in terms of war history. These minutiae should be given pertinent study for the benefit of the citizens. Whether or not Iraq would become the next Vietnam, everyone should be vigilant to prevent this possibility to materialize for the wellbeing of our generation and beyond.

Sources

- "History of Iran." Wikipedia. July 2007. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Iran>.
- "History of Iraq." Wikipedia. 10 Aug. 2007. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Iraq>.
- "History of Vietnam." Wikipedia. May 2007.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_vietnam>.
- "Iraq vs. Vietnam." Vassar. 2005.
<http://www.aavc.vassar.edu/vq/articles/features_iraq_fall2006>.
- Kapila, Subhash. "Iran: United States Strategic Options' Re-examined." 18 Apr. 2007.
<<http://www.saag.org/%5Cpapers23%5Cpaper2213.html>>.
- Mackubin, Owens T. "No Comparison: Iraq is Not like Vietnam." National Review Online. Nov. 2003. <<http://www.ashbrook.org/publicat/oped/owens/03/no-comparison.html>>.
- Odom, William E. "Iraq through the Prism of Vietnam." 8 Mar. 2006.
<<http://niemanwatchdog.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Background.view&backgroundid=78>>.
- Sterner, Douglas C. "Is There Danger in Repeating the Same Mistakes." 1 Nov. 2003.
<http://www.homeofheroes.com/talkingpoints/0311_vietnamVSiraq.html>.