

THE VIETNAM WAR and THE WAR IN THE PERSIAN GULF: SOME SIMILARITIES,
SOME DIFFERENCES

(This takes more time.... don't always trust instant evaluation...
best interpretation requires some distance on the subject...
this is almost instant...

- (1) The two events are very much interrelated....
President Bush: Inaugural --

When he announced U.S. involvement in the Persian Gulf War
"not like Vietnam -- this one will be quick, decisive,
and dramatic...."

What did this mean? (1) That the war wouldn't drag on and on
(2) That the objective of the war would be clear-cut
(3) That the means to achieve those goals would be
precise and effective
(4) AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, THAT THE WARRIORS WOULD
HAVE THE SUPPORT OF THE NATION WHILE THE FIGHTING
WAS TAKING PLACE...

Corollary: that, after the war, the warriors would
return in VALOR to a GRATEFUL NATION.

- (2) The Vietnam War influenced the conduct of the Persian Gulf
War as well as the myth (the meaning) that would be attached
to it....

CONDUCT: specific objectives....
finite, limited goals....
decisive action....
political support at home.

MEANING: this also straightforward:..

- (1) act of naked aggression was committed by
an evil ruler whose misdeeds were pathological
(2) such action had to be repelled for the sake
of the people against whom the aggression
was perpetrated.....

-- to do so was requested by the people
-- to do so was supported by JUSTICE....

Catholic Bishops argued about
"just war" theory...

and by February 26...lost the consensus on
this subject...

RECTITUDE had been violated....

world order cannot let such naked aggression
go unchecked....

- (3) EVEN SAM NUNN called the Cause "JUST..."
but was not sure how WISE it was.

NATIONAL CONSENSUS: the aggression had to be repelled....

big question about tactics: (1) We should give the
embargo more time to work; (2) we should not
commit the troops on the ground as long as the
air strike was effective...

Challenge to the PRESIDENT: to not allow the
national support to diminish

Why? BECAUSE ONE OF THE LESSONS OF THE VIETNAM WAR
IS THAT THE MILITARY CANNOT EFFECTIVELY PROSECUTE
A WAR IF THE PEOPLE -- MORALLY, PSYCHOLOGICALLY,
SPIRITUALLY, INTELLECTUALLY, IDEOLOGICALLY -- DO
NOT SUPPORT IT....

And NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO PROSECUTE A WAR IF THE
MAJORITY OF THE PEOPLE ARE OPPOSED TO IT.....

So, we have NAKED AGGRESSION committed by an EVIL RULER who
has given evidence of PATHOLOGICAL BEHAVIOR.....which
AGGRESSION needs to be REPELLED for the sake of WORLD
ORDER.....evidence of which is that numerous nations
sign on so that there is a COALITION OF ARMED FORCES.....

And the LEADER KNOWS that his MILITARY ACTION must
occur DECISIVELY within a LIMITED TIME FRAME --
the people won't tolerate it for long....

And the LEADER is WARY about LEVELS & DEGREES OF SUPPORT....

In this sense He BENEFITED from the VIETNAM WAR....

one of the lessons of VIETNAM: separate the POLICY from
the WARRIOR

Don't blame the WARRIOR for the WAR

Don't make the WARRIOR shoulder all of the
responsibility for the WAR...

We learned this the hard way...but, as a nation,
we had pretty much learned this after thinking
about the Ramifications of the Vietnam War.

A WARY LEADER knows what he has to do: PRIMARILY, he
must KEEP COMBAT FATALITIES at a MINIMUM...

(everyone knew that hosts of BODY BAGS...being shown
on TELEVISION...would turn the nation against the
war.....and then the war couldn't be fought
effectively....

IMPLICATION FROM VIETNAM WAR: There are always TWO WARS...the WAR IN
the MILITARY THEATER...and the WAR AT HOME
Each presents challenges
And there can be NO SUCCESS in the THEATER unless
there is support AT HOME

back to BODY BAGS....

This, in my judgment, is RESPONSIBLE for the HEAVY LOSS OF LIFE on the IRAQI side....
We don't have firm figures yet....
But the number of AIR SORTIES surpasses any of all previous wars....
and the amount of tonnage of bombs dropped also surpasses previous wars....

MASSIVE DESTRUCTION OF IRAQ --- though I believe them when they say that they tried to avoid hitting civilian targets....

WHY the MASSIVENESS? to prepare the way so that LOSS OF AMERICAN LIFE would be minimal once the Ground War began

WHEN THIS FIRST STARTED? How many lives is it worth?

Well, some people thought, maybe about 100...

Outcome: less than that, that is, on the COALITION SIDE....

(3) "Third Point" --

Much of WHAT WAS DONE IN THE PERSIAN GULF WAR, as RELATION TO VIETNAM WAR....
WAS DONE BY INVERSION

Relationships between the two wars -- primary relation is one of CONTRAST
Persian Gulf War is UNLIKE the Vietnam War
" " " is OPPOSITE of the Vietnam War
" " " is REVERSAL of Vietnam War EXPECTATIONS

Complicated situation, because VIETNAM WAR was also understood by INVERSION....
that is, it was a WAR that REVERSED EXPECTATIONS....
it was a war Unlike a Previous War

VIETNAM was hard to understand because it broke faith with the WORLD WAR II model....
what Studs Terkel called "the good war..."

So, according to World War II expectations. warriors go off to war against an evil enemy, win the war, and come back as heroes....and there are PARADES and WELCOME HOME salutes. and TICKER-TAPE....and gratitude to GOD for the nation's successes...

Well, we've seen how VIETNAM registers within this framework....

PARADES...and WELCOME HOME salutes....Hardly....
not for a long time, and not until the Veterans did it
for themselves.....

Gratitude to God for the nation's successes....
HARDLY....a loss of confidence in warrior mythology
and the rise of a MORAL MAJORITY that warns us
that worse things will befall us if we don't
get moral again...

In SUMMARY: The Vietnam War doesn't fit the NORM....
The VIETNAM WAR must be interpreted in CONTRAST to
the WORLD WAR II PARADIGM....

Well, but what about the WAR IN THE PERSIAN GULF....

My suggestion: this is WORLD WAR II all over again....
The PARADIGM IS BACK.....

THE NORM has been reinstated.....
(many happy, happy reunions between separated family members & loved
In short, THE PERSIAN GULF is saying that THE VIETNAM WAR ones..
is an ANOMALY all kinds
of national
In short, Persian Gulf war says VIETNAM WAR is jingoism....
an ABNORMALITY..... A SKEWED WAR....

What, THEN, IS THIS SAYING ABOUT THE VIETNAM WAR....?

Big question: Did these people, who fought in Vietnam, did
THEY EXPERIENCE WHAT THEY DID because the War was ABNORMAL
OR DID THE CHARACTER OF THAT WAR ENABLE THEM TO PEER
into some DEEPER HUMAN TRUTHS?

WHEN WARS GO WELL, ARE THEY TELLING THE TRUTH ABOUT
HUMAN LIFE....OR ARE THEY MASKING THAT TRUTH FROM US....?

DO GOOD WARS TEACH US RELIABLE TRUTHS...OR DO THEY
KEEP US FROM DISCOVERING THEM?

DO YOU FIND OUT HOW THE WORLD WORKS WHEN EVERYTHING
IS GOING WELL....OR DO YOU LEARN THE TRUTH ABOUT
LIFE WHEN YOU ARE UP AGAINST NEARLY INSURMOUNTABLE
CHALLENGES...AND YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOUR RESOURCES ARE?