

Iraq = Vietnam: Misinterpreting the Metaphor

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Of course Iraq is not Vietnam and it's not 1965 either and neither is Iraq a nation of tropical rain forests. If one were to make comparisons based purely on geography, then Algeria would be a better one. But geography only determines the form of the struggle, not what drives it. The Vietnamese war of independence, forged in the liberation war against the Japanese occupation, honed in the defeat of the French, finally and at a cost of perhaps 3 million Vietnamese lives and uncounted Laotian, and Cambodian people, destroyed the political will of the US imperium to continue. The 'loss' of Vietnam was the single biggest setback for imperialism in the post-WWII period, proving decisively that wars are ultimately fought not with technology but with people and peoples' unbreakable will to fight when the struggle is a just one. In purely military terms, the defeat of imperialism/colonialism in Vietnam took thirty years to accomplish but its roots are much deeper and indeed are universal.

One has to marvel at the arrogance and blind stupidity of the US and British who have clearly learnt nothing from the past, instead they have allowed their vindictive desperation to get the better of them. A parallel might well be Hitler's decision to invade the Soviet Union in 1941, again assuming that a nation of peasants were incapable of defeating the 'master race' with its overwhelming military force (at the time, the biggest and most advanced military force on the planet).

Following the almost total destruction of Fallujah, the British and American media has been full of phrases that talk of having "broken the back of the insurgency" and "turning the corner" in the struggle to destroy the terrorists. All of it, we are told, in the bizarre, upside down world of the West's propaganda war to "prepare the country for democratic elections", though it's not explained how exactly, by earning the undying hatred of the Iraqi people, will help the puppets win an engineered election. But these are mere details when what counts is maintaining a constant stream of disinformation, not for the Iraqis but for our domestic populations.

The problem the imperium has is exemplified when one reads that

"...the insurgency remains potent despite the fall of its stronghold, Fallujah" AP 20/11/04

But whoever claimed that Fallujah was some kind of "stronghold" of the 'insurgents' especially when you consider that the occupation forces have lost control of some 36 cities and towns across Iraq and aside from heavily armoured 'incursions' remain confined to heavily fortified bases for the most part. Are all 36 cities strongholds of the 'insurgency' and if so, what does that tell us about the nature of the 'insurgency'?

This is deception on a grand scale and all grist for the propaganda mill but it's important to

recognise that there are in actuality two wars going on here, one in Iraq and one in the Western media and having already lost the war in Iraq (even though it will not of course admit to it), it's most critical battle is the war with its own populations. So we read that

"Bush will successfully stabilize Iraq, and the election there will surprise the world by being conducted openly and fairly. In all, he is far better off relying on the neocons than a crabbed, amoral realist doctrine. Abandoning Iraq and Afghanistan, as the realists counsel, would be a prescription for disaster." Jacob Heilbrunn, Los Angeles Times, 20/11/04

The article that the above excerpt is taken from is titled "Neocons' growing role good for Bush". The article disses the idea that with Bush winning a second term, the 'neo-cons' are now 'surplus to requirement' as the 'realists' – apparently holed up in the State Department – will once more gain the ascendancy. But this assumes that the 'neo-cons' are some kind of 'aberration' a position I have never subscribed to and a position that history supports. All that has happened is a geographical shift from a focus on Central and South America in the 1980s under Reagan/Bush Snr to the Middle East, beginning in the 1990s under Bush Snr with Gulf War II.

I think it's absolutely critical for the Left to disabuse itself of the notion that current US policy under Bush is fundamentally different than that of past administrations, for in reality what has happened is that two different periods of US imperialist policy are now conjoined. The first, represented by Elliot Abrams, John Bolton, Richard Armitage, Otto Reich, Henry Kissinger et al, the key players in Reagan's 'low intensity war' policy in Central America have joined with those who are aligned with a revanchist Israeli right, Wolfowitz, Perle, Feith et al. The proof of the pudding as they say, is in the eating, for these two groups make up the core of the Bush foreign policy team. The common ground between them is Iran and Israel (read Iran/contra). As ever, let history be our guide!

What made this possible was the end of the Cold War and a de facto power vacuum in the Middle East with the removal of the Soviet Union as an obstacle to US expansion Eastward. Hence two elements of US foreign policy came together, hence it's safe to assume that US policy under Bush will move on two main fronts, one in Central/Southern America viz Venezuela, Colombia and now Uruguay and the other, the continuation of the push Eastward.

It is less important that the US actually 'win' a military victory in Iraq than it is in preventing a unified Arab opposition to the US/Israeli alliance from emerging. As with Yugoslavia, the objective is the Balkanisation of the Arab world. This explains why the US deliberately encouraged and participated in the destruction of Iraqi civil society, for the objective (in line with Israeli policy) is a fragmented and powerless collection of Arab 'statelets' (with the exception of Egypt and Jordan who, it is planned, will be the West's 'policemen' for the region) unable to resist US/ Israeli designs. It follows therefore that the next target will be Syria/Lebanon followed by Iran once the Arab world has been dismembered and emasculated. Well that's the plan.

The problem the US faces is persuading an increasingly sceptical and now patently divided domestic population (effectively 50/50) that such a policy is necessary to 'defend freedom and democracy' and to continue the 'war on terror', as the 'war on terror' is the *raison d'être* that makes the entire programme possible. I contend therefore that the war in Iraq is actually of less importance than the war at home, as the war in Iraq will be decided by the

Iraqis, not us, unless that is, we succeed in removing Bush/Blair, not a realistic objective in the short term.

The first step then is to move beyond an emotive and subjective response that labels Bush as a 'fascist', for if Bush is to be labelled as a fascist, what did that make Reagan and Nixon? For the reality is an imperialism unleashed but an economy in peril with a falling dollar, a vast foreign debt, increasing competition from countries like China (and the EU if it can get its act together) in short, a capitalism in a dire crisis of over-accumulation that has reverted to a time before the post-WWII period, for who can argue that the existence of a Soviet Union that possessed nuclear parity curbed the ambitions of the US, forcing it to put aside intra-capitalist rivalries in order to 'take care' of the Reds first?

For the Left, this means disabusing itself of the fantasy of a 'liberal' alternative to Bush in the form of the Democratic Party and a recognition that what Bush represents is what has always been the guts of US policy but one that it has been able to sell to a domestic population under the guise of the 'war on Communism'. Take the 'Red Menace' away and not only has it had to invent a replacement, but in order to sell it, it has had to bring the 'war' home and in doing so, it has exposed its real face to its domestic population. This, more than anything else, accounts for the divided vote (a reality that Black Americans have long been subjected to and one reflected in the voting pattern of Black Americans, one that bucked the trend).

Which brings me back to my starting point, the War on Vietnam and the parallel with Iraq, for the parallel exists not in the nature of the war itself but in the policy that drove it, in the first instance by the war on Communism and in the other by the war on Terrorism. With a population divided almost equally over policy, the prime objective must be to expose the unashamedly imperialist nature of the US that uses the tried and tested methods of patriotism, xenophobia and just plain ignorance, to enlist the support of a significant percentage of the population as part of the drive for a return to 'general war' as a 'solution' to capitalism's inherent contradictions.

It is within this context that the illusion of 'peak oil' plays a significant role, for increasingly we will see the Chinese population being presented as competing for resources that are 'rightfully ours' thus shifting the focus from climate change and unrestrained and irrational capitalist consumption back to the 'problem of over-population' and 'dwindling' resources. Expect a propaganda campaign that will focus increasingly on the 'divine right' of 'Whitey' to own everything and that the rising power of China threatens the well being of a comfortable 2-3% of the planet's population. You have been warned.

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