

FAULTY HISTORICAL PARALLELS: BUSH DRAWS, ONCE AGAIN, THE WRONG LESSONS

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For over four years the Bush administration has resisted any comparisons between the war in Iraq and the U.S. experience in Vietnam. Bush has repeatedly rejected that idea that we find ourselves into the middle of a civil conflict, and because of that we are bogged down in an unwinnable war.

Against all evidence, Bush also objected to the charge that the Iraqi army was doing just as poorly as the South Vietnamese forces did against the Viet Cong. When the British Army handed over a base to the Iraqis in Amara in August, 2006, it was looted and made unusable within 48 hours. In both Vietnam and Iraq their armies refused to stand up and we had to step down, not because our troops failed, but because our leaders led them into quagmires.

Bush now wants to draw his own lessons from Vietnam. Even though he chose not to serve there, having secured a safe spot in the Texas Air National Guard, he believes that our troops should have stayed until victory over the Communists had been achieved. Bush suggests that the defeatists in Vietnam are responsible for the boat people, the reeducation camps, and the killing fields in Cambodia.

Bush seems to forget that Nixon first secretly bombed and invaded neutral Cambodia and forced out Prince Norodom Sihanouk, now head of a Khmer constitutional monarchy. We replaced Sihanouk with a weak, right-wing government that made a Khmer Rouge victory and their atrocities possible.

It is true that many Vietnamese suffered horribly after the war, but that pales in comparison to the at least one million who died because of our intervention, and who still die from exploding munitions and whose infants are deformed by Agent Orange. Likewise, far more Iraqis have died in our war than were killed during Saddam's 24-year rule. In both countries, and in Afghanistan, American military shock and awe has killed thousands of innocent civilians.

Bush's concern for the Vietnamese boat people is not matched by his administration's cold embrace of Iraqis fleeing the war. Nearly two million Iraqis have

left their country and most of them are living under miserable conditions in Jordan and Syria. To date the U.S. has accepted only 592 Iraqi refugees, while Sweden with 8.5 million people has accepted 70,000.

Bush also drew parallels to Japan and Korea and how U.S. perseverance there led to the development of two successful democracies. Imperial Japan directly attacked us and our allies, whereas Saddam had nothing to do with the 9/11 attacks and had no substantial links to Al Qaeda, which is now operating in Iraq only because of the chaos we have caused there.

Bush claims that our failure to stay in Vietnam has emboldened today's terrorists, but placing 162,000 U. S. troops in the middle of the Muslim world has done far more, even our intelligence agencies tell him so, to intensify the recruitment of jihadists.

When Saddam did invade Kuwait in 1991, a broad coalition rose up to push him back to Baghdad. Bush the Elder made a wise decision not to pursue him there because, as his Defense Secretary Dick Cheney warned: "The notion that we ought to now go to Baghdad and somehow take control of the country strikes me . . . as a classic definition of a quagmire."

With regard to Korea, Bush neglected to remind his audience, many of whom Korean War veterans, that the U.S. supported Korean dictators for 42 years before shock of the killing 207 student demonstrators in 1980 gave way to the first truly democratic elections in 1987. The Korean War was also waged under UN command in response to a direct attack by North Korea. It was not a preemptive war of choice.

Earlier this year Bush drew another faulty parallel, this time to the Revolutionary War. Speaking to members of the Virginia National Guard on July 4, Bush compared American soldiers in Iraq to citizen recruits who left their homes to join General Washington against the invading British and their German mercenaries. But surely American troops and Blackwater's hired guns are the Red Coats and Hessians in this war, and the American rebels are the insurgents, who, according to British generals, refused to fight according to the rules of war.

Bush's blatant misreading of history has undermined what is left of his credibility. We now have a U.S. president who is more out of touch with reality than ever before. His refusal to acknowledge that Alberto Gonzales made any mistakes is proof enough of this claim.