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Dispelling the Ghost:
Iraq as the Vietnam War We Cannot Afford to Lose

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Article abstract

As the war in Iraq lengthens, references to it as another Vietnam have increased. But Vietnam today is more of a ghost than a reality of what it was 30 years ago. As a ghost, Vietnam carries a haunting message of defeat for Western interventions in "third world wars." Despite some dangerous parallels, this message is wrong in that the American defeat in Vietnam was largely a self-inflicted wound. Further, the geopolitics of the War on Terror and its strategy of preemption (as opposed to the Cold War and its policy of containment), has fused the war in Iraq with the battle against al-Qaeda to the point where Iraq has become the struggle from which Americans cannot walk away — as they did in Vietnam.

Dispelling the Ghost: Iraq as the Vietnam War We Cannot Afford to Lose

by
Timothy J. Lomperis

"The public views this every day, Mr. Secretary [Rumsfeld], more and more like Vietnam."[1]

Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC)

ABSTRACT

As the war in Iraq lengthens, references to it as another Vietnam have increased. But Vietnam today is more of a ghost than a reality of what it was 30 years ago. As a ghost, Vietnam carries a haunting message of defeat for Western interventions in "third world wars." Despite some dangerous parallels, this message is wrong in that the American defeat in Vietnam was largely a self-inflicted wound. Further, the geopolitics of the War on Terror and its strategy of pre-emption (as opposed to the Cold War and its policy of containment), has fused the war in Iraq with the battle against al-Qaeda to the point where Iraq has become the struggle from which Americans cannot walk away — as they did in Vietnam.

INTRODUCTION

If Iraq has become another Vietnam, then Iraq is the Vietnam War we cannot afford to lose. A crescendo of arguments supports this thesis. First, I do acknowledge that statements like Senator Graham's above illustrate that an association between Iraq and Vietnam has taken hold. Second, this is because there are sobering factors of similarity that tie these events together. Third, however, this linkage owes too much to the haunting ghost of Vietnam than to its complex reality. As a ghost, Vietnam conveys an almost deliberately false image of total defeat that is debilitating to the American mission in Iraq. Fourth, it is false because in reality Vietnam was not the terrible defeat conjured up by this ghost. Finally, it is dangerous because the wars in Vietnam and Iraq are strategically very different. Vietnam was a peripheral war to the fortunes of the larger Cold

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War. To the War on Terror, Iraq has become pivotal. Saigon was a war we could afford to lose; but Baghdad, in the strategic terms of the War on Terror, is as central to the outcome of this war as the fate of Berlin was to the Cold War. Iraq, then, is a war the US must win in the larger War on Terror, and it cannot allow the danger of a false analogy to Vietnam contribute to its downfall. Hence, the over-arching purpose to this article is to sever the damning nature of the linkage of Vietnam to Iraq so that the war in Iraq may be assessed in its own terms and policies developed that are free from the automatic defeatism that attends any summoning of the Vietnam analogy.[2]

ASSOCIATIONS AND SIMILARITIES (Arguments One and Two)

Republican Senator Graham of South Carolina was only stating the obvious when he told Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, that "The public views this every day . . . more and more like Vietnam." He was only echoing the headlines at the time that were appearing all across the country: "The Road from Tet to Fallujah," "From Vietnam to Iraq: Pretext or Precedent," "Why have we landed in Vietnam again?," and "Iraq is developing into another Vietnam," to cite just a few.[3]

As this fix has been made, support for the war in Iraq has correspondingly ebbed. As a correlation, before this fix set in, support for the war in Iraq was well over 50 percent. As these headlines became absorbed from the summer of 2004 onwards, this support has slipped to just under 40 percent today. Indeed, this 10 percent slippage correlates nicely with the rise in the public linkage between Vietnam and Iraq. In polling data from the Pew Research Center, 25 percent of the American public in April 2004 thought Iraq was another Vietnam. By April 2006, this linkage had risen to 41 percent.[4]

The point of the linkage, of course, is to tar Iraq with the brush of the Vietnam debacle. As if to clinch this point, two recent jeremiads against the Iraq War have used Vietnam as the backdrop for their cases of Iraq as a "fiasco" (in the case of Thomas Ricks), and of an administration in a "state of denial" over it (for Bob Woodward). Ricks quotes one general saying, "I hope we don't f-k this up like we did Vietnam — I'd rather die than go through twenty years of that again."[5] Ricks then goes one to set forth just how Washington turned Iraq into another Vietnam. In this comparison to Vietnam, Woodward cites the warning of a key advisor to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld that "The President's strategy will die in the embrace of such a comparison."[6]

To be sure, there is much about Iraq that is like Vietnam. It is the first American war since Vietnam that has become protracted and Americans lack patience for long wars. The subsequent Powell Doctrine, developed in the 1980s, speaks well to this aversion. It goes something like this: assemble an overwhelming force, quickly overcome your opponents with a *blitzkrieg* of "shock and awe," pronounce victory ("mission accomplished"), and come

home.[7] Americans like to order up their wars short, bloodless, and decisive — like the short little wars in Grenada, Panama, and Kosovo; not like the drawn-out ones in Korea, Vietnam, and now Iraq.

As two "long wars," unfortunately, there is much that Vietnam and Iraq share. I will just surface four similarities that are the most dangerous in their potential to turn Iraq into a defeat as well. First, in both Vietnam and Iraq, Washington was tempted by illusions of its own omnipotence and the seductive weakness of the intended targets. Fundamentally, this has meant that, blinded by its own geostrategic power, the US took little notice of the domestic politics on the ground and ran into complex labyrinths. These political ambushes — and, indeed, military ones as well — led to that swamp called "quagmire."[8] Similar to the initial optimism by administration enthusiasts about a war in Iraq, President Kennedy's senior military advisor, General Maxwell Taylor, reassured his boss after a quick pre-war inspection of Vietnam in 1961: "As far as an area for the operation of U.S. troops, South Vietnam is not an excessively difficult or unpleasant place to operate . . .. The risks of backing into a major war by way of South Vietnam . . . are not impressive."[9]

Succumbing to this temptation has opened up a second dangerous parallel, in which both Vietnam and Iraq policy makers relied on their ideologies to motivate their interventions and steamroller over any contrary local politics. In his prize-winning account of the Vietnam War, Leslie Gelb came to the final conclusion that it was the doctrine of containment that blindsided Washington to a set of contrary local politics in Vietnam not driven by a global need to contain communism. According to Gelb, the ultimate lesson was not to approach international crises, and potential interventions, from deductive, ideological lenses, but to return to a basic on-the-ground pragmatism in assessing international problems.[10]

In the case of Iraq, the US has committed errors of ideology on both sides. While this writer certainly supports the creation of a democratic government in Iraq, as does public opinion in Iraq by large numbers, making the blithe assumption that Iraqis would universally welcome American forces as liberators and facilitate reconstruction on a German or Japanese model, as Bush administration spokespersons clearly did, runs a deductive approach roughshod over the deep nationalist sensitivities in virtually all sectors of Iraqi society.[11] This is not to say that the interventions in either Vietnam or Iraq were necessarily wrong, but it does suggest that interventions guided by more local political pragmatism would have moved along more felicitous paths. In Vietnam, such an approach would have sought to embrace broader political groupings into the South Vietnamese government that went beyond cliques of generals, confirmed anti-communists, and Catholics.[12]

In Iraq, it might have at least extended to more postwar planning than crowd control at exuberant parades. Actually, this is a little harsh. There cer-

tainly was such planning in Iraq, but the State Department and Pentagon had conflictual visions over how to manage a democratic postwar transition and this has not helped. President Bush attempted to coordinate this by putting his national security advisor, Condoleeza Rice, in charge of the planning and direction of the Coalition Provisional Authority.[13] On the ground in Iraq, however, her authority did not take hold. Instead, L. Paul Bremer, the civilian head of the Coalition Provisional Authority, and General John Abizaid, commander of CENTCOM, were at frequent loggerheads. The general felt Bremer was autocratic in his politics and Bremer wondered whether the general even had a strategy. Indeed, the three mistakes of the two of them cited by Woodward — de-Baathification of the administrative bureaucracy, disbanding the Iraqi military, and rejecting an Iraqi Council — led Ricks to conclude that these missteps actually helped start and sustain the Iraqi insurgency.[14] Indeed, these divisions contain echoes of the contentious incrementalism of the Johnson presidency in Vietnam.

The third of these similarities is that in any long war there is an ineluctable pressure to provide upbeat accounts from the front to shore up public support at home. The focal point of this pressure is on numbers; namely, to use optimistic numbers to show progress. But in both Vietnam and Iraq, these optimistic numbers can be fraught with dangers. In Vietnam, the most devastating such moment came in the deliberations of the "wise men" during the Tet Offensive of 1968 over the request for an additional 206,000 troops to deal with the offensive. In running through Pentagon calculations of enemy casualty rates, Arthur Goldberg, one of the "wise" ones, noted that, at the rate cited, reported communist deaths should have brought communist troop strength down to zero. The request was shelved and President Johnson announced two weeks later that he was stepping down from the presidency.[15]

Because of this humiliation, the military vowed "never again." Never again would it furnish numbers of enemy forces or casualties. There would be no more "body counts." It stuck to this vow in Grenada, Panama, the Gulf War, and Kosovo. But this can be overdone. Numbers of enemy casualties in Somalia might have helped overcome a public feeling that the 18 dead US soldiers in the battle of 3 October 1993 represented a debacle of arms. Knowing that this small task force of about 100 soldiers killed and wounded over 1,000 Somalis, which the American public did not know, might have mitigated the perception of defeat. The same has become true in Iraq where the large numbers of guerrilla casualties suffered by the forces of the Shi'ite cleric Muktadar al-Sadr in their April 2004 uprising, for example, have not been reported, even as the daily US casualty rates pulse across the wires eroding American will.[16] And these same numbers have come to haunt us in Iraq. In an editorial in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, the paper noted that in 2003 the Pentagon reported an insurgent force in Iraq of 5,000. Over that same year, the Pentagon reported killing or capturing nearly 20,000 insurgents. A year later (2004), in reporting substantial progress, it still said there were 5,000 insurgents. The editorial concluded, "The delusion con-

tinues."[17] Since then, there has been a notable reluctance in public reports to offer estimates on the size of the insurgency.

When numbers become "delusions," the fourth and final unfortunate point of tangency between the wars in Vietnam and Iraq arises, the "credibility gap." It came to President Lyndon Johnson with all these numbers and his optimistic vision of a "light at the end of the tunnel" and promises "to bring the boys home by Christmas." In November 1967, on the eve of the Tet Offensive, his commanding general, William C. Westmoreland, returned from Vietnam to declare to the National Press Club in Washington, DC, "We have reached an important point when the end begins to come into view."[18]

Now in Iraq, President Bush is under assault for two of his three arguments for launching the war: the imminent threat of Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction and the linkage between *al-Qaeda* and Saddam's regime, a linkage that would have given Osama bin Laden an even more devastating capability for follow-on attacks against the United States. The third point of the brutal tyranny of the Baathist regime itself remains unchallenged. With these weapons still not found three years after the American invasion of Iraq, a chorus of voices has arisen to protest that the public has been misled. As just one of these voices, former Missouri Senator Thomas Eagleton, has exclaimed, "Deception, exaggeration, and pandering created our fiasco in Iraq."[19] Al Gore has called the president a liar.[20] Since virtually all the world's intelligence services reported that Iraq did possess these weapons and Baghdad never showed proof of destroying any of this reported inventory, this *casus belli* remains unsettled.[21] What makes it unsettled is that all of this intelligence makes it possible that at least some of these weapons may yet be found, even as their continued absence leaves the position of the administration vulnerable without the evidence to justify any claim of an imminent threat.[22]

It is like the controversial ambiguity of the Gulf of Tonkin all over again. In August 1964, Johnson asked for, and received, an overwhelming set of votes in both houses of Congress authorizing the president to take whatever actions were necessary to secure peace in Southeast Asia, "including the use of armed force," in response to night time attacks on US Navy destroyers by North Vietnamese PT boats. Whether these attacks, as a *casus belli*, even took place remained mired in controversy until 1996, when Edwin Moise, a prominent Vietnam War historian, definitively concluded that the first attack *did* take place, but the second one did not. To add to the confusion, the intended targets of these North Vietnamese patrol boats may have been CIA-sponsored South Vietnamese saboteur vessels rather than the US destroyers they struck in the high seas.[23]

The point to stress here is that these similarities between Vietnam and Iraq pose dangers or warnings to the American effort in Iraq but not inevitabilities of defeat. The latter begins to happen only when fear overwhelms sober analysis and Vietnam becomes transformed into a fearsome ghost.

THE GHOST OF VIETNAM (Argument Three)

Every country has its ghosts. Ghosts appear when a country loses its way and becomes fearful that it is on some precipice of looming disaster. At just this moment of vulnerability, the ghosts materialize and the fright is enough to scare the country either to tip over the edge or retreat in terror. For America, its foreign policy ghost is Vietnam.

In analytical terms, a ghost is a caricature of an event that conveys a symbolic message designed to carry one meaning or lesson for whatever contemporary event it is conjured up as a warning. Put simply, the trauma of Vietnam spawned a ghost that conveys a ubiquitous message of defeat for any American intervention in the Third World. In the survey question on Vietnam cited earlier, for example, the wording of the question automatically assumed Vietnam was a defeat, and linked Vietnam and Iraq through an image of defeat: "Some people are comparing Iraq to the war in Vietnam. Do you think Iraq will turn out to be another Vietnam, or do you think the U.S. will accomplish its goals in Iraq?"[24]

The only way to free policy makers from the paralysis provoked by stirring up this ghost is to confront the ghost's message with the reality of Vietnam. The reality of Vietnam is that it was not the total defeat that the image implies. Even in this defeat, there were things Washington did right, some partial victories, and some factors that were unique to Vietnam and are not applicable for lessons beyond its shores. Scrutinizing the more complex reality of Vietnam, then, can make it disappear from any automatically debilitating association with Iraq.

As America's ghost, Vietnam has a long history. In fact, it began to haunt the US before the war was even over. As in Iraq today, many predicted that Vietnam would be a disaster when the war was in its infancy.[25] When it did become a real disaster, it only got worse. In places like the Congo, Nicaragua, and El Salvador, where Washington contemplated interventions after Vietnam, it had the effect of chilling America's "interventionist impulse." Indeed, it was former President Jimmy Carter who complained, after coming under heavy criticism for sending resupply aircraft to Congolese military forces in 1979, "Not every instance of the firm application of power is a potential Vietnam."[26] For some on the left, this was a good thing. If Vietnam has succeeded in freezing America's interventionist impulses, then the Vietnam War has had a good consequence. Hence, although the US did intervene in Nicaragua and El Salvador in the 1980s (though not with ground forces), these interventions were subject to such intense Congressional scrutiny and strictures that they became almost furtive ventures.[27] For those on the right, however, this was a terrible thing. In former President Richard Nixon's words, it had reduced the United States to a "pitiable, helpless giant," and he called on his countrymen to "purge ourselves of the Vietnam syndrome" because it has "tarnished our ideals, . . . crippled our will, and turned us into a military giant and a diplomatic dwarf."[28]

Fighting the Ghost

In world politics, time is not frozen. In the United States, while most civilians wrung their hands over these apparitions of Vietnam, the military in the 1980s was busy exorcising this ghost from the nation's armed forces. After the humiliation of "Desert One" in Iran in 1980, these problems within the military, between it and civilian leaders as well as difficulties between the military and larger society, came to sharp national attention. This focus gave rise to a military reform movement that consisted of members from both parties in Congress, serving and retired military officers, and national security academics. Among these luminaries were Senators Gary Hart and Barry Goldwater, Congresspersons Bill Nichols and Pat Schroeder, Generals Brent Scowcroft and David Jones, Admiral William Crowe, and such academics as Sam Huntington, Joe Nye, and Vince Davis.

The efforts of these reformers culminated in the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. Many of its provisions were specifically designed to free the military from the strictures of the Vietnam era. The most salient were first, the end of the unanimity rule that had prevented each of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) from speaking freely before the political leadership, which now enabled the Chairman of the JCS to serve as the single military adviser to the president; and second, the granting to the commanders of the separate military commands (the CINCS) actual command over their constituent units (as opposed to command being retained in the separate services). These measures increased the weight of military advice, went a long way toward ending civilian interference in military management, and did much to end the squabbles of command that so debilitated the Vietnam war effort.[29]

By the end of the 1980s, America's military establishment, shunning any counterinsurgency legacy from Vietnam, formed itself into a veritable *Wehrmacht* with a *blitzkrieg* strategy, which, in English, became known as the "AirLand Battle."[30] It was a strategy of heavy conventional tanks winning out over light helicopters. It was also a military strategy primed for George Bush's later National Security Strategy of pre-emption. In Iraq, Saddam Hussein still saw an America mesmerized by its Vietnam ghost. In the fateful year of 1990, as Saddam plotted over what he could get away with, he was encouraged by American nightmares of Vietnam. He specifically warned the United States that intervention in the Persian Gulf would bring another Vietnam river of body bags.[31] His subsequent invasion of Kuwait in August shocked the American public; and, indeed, in the debates in Congress over whether or not to go to war, Vietnam's ghost reappeared. The votes in the House and Senate for war were extremely close, as Vietnam and Munich struggled for symbolic mastery of the American psyche: 250 to 183 in the House and 53 to 47 in the Senate.[32] Munich won, but barely.

In the triumph of this strategy in the Gulf War's *Desert Storm* over the

mass-surrendering Iraqi forces, George H. W. Bush's exultations were more about Vietnam than Iraq. "By God, we've kicked the Vietnam Syndrome once and for all," he crowed.[33] But it was this same Vietnam Syndrome that drew him up short at the Euphrates River. Across this river lay the heavily populated highways to a potentially revolutionary Baghdad, and to another Vietnam — and he shied away.[34]

Vietnam, then, was far from finished as a ghost. Its most spectacular incarnation came in Somalia in 1993. In the streets of Mogadishu, with two "Black Hawks down" and 18 soldiers dead, Bill Clinton chose to withdraw from Somalia entirely. This sharp episode was an eerie revisitation of the 1968 Tet Offensive in Vietnam. Though Tet was a massive military defeat for the communists, and even the destruction of their revolution, it was Lyndon Johnson who resigned his presidency over this offensive and began the slow drumbeat of troop withdrawals leading to final defeat in 1975.[35] Similarly, in Mogadishu 25 years later, despite the fundamental success of the *Task Force Ranger* mission in capturing two key lieutenants of the warlord Mohammed Farrah Aidid (and rounding up 70 others), the 18 US casualties were too much for Clinton — even though this force of 100 American soldiers had killed 500 Somalis and wounded another 1,000. The warlord's forces, in fact, were decimated in this assault and had used up all their inventory of RPGs (rocket propelled grenades), the basic weapon of the Somali armed factions. Indeed, in the initial aftermath of the assault, arrangements were underway for the surrender of Aidid — plans that were hastily shelved with Clinton's announcement.[36] Unfortunately, one person who drew inspiration from this American withdrawal was Osama bin Laden, who had furnished Aidid with weapons and training. In an interview in 1998, bin Laden proclaimed, "We are certain that we shall prevail over the Americans . . . [because] the Americans rushed out of Somalia in shame and disgrace."[37] Somalia ranks as one of the ghost of Vietnam's proudest achievements.

When global attention shifted to the Balkans in the mid-1990s and to Kosovo in particular in 1999, the impact of Vietnam became more muted. But it persisted in the express reluctance to deploy ground forces on the part of almost all parties to this airpower only victory by the NATO alliance over Serbia. The theater commander, General Wesley Clark, ran into a wall of resistance to any ground forces option from all quarters, including the White House and Pentagon. References to Vietnam as a source of this opposition were frequent.[38]

The 9/11 attacks banished all this. America now had a more tangible ghost or monster to fear, and it was a flesh-and-blood person, Osama bin Laden. Also, the black smoke rising from the twin towers of the World Trade Center looked a lot more like the black inferno that engulfed the battleship *Arizona* at Pearl Harbor than the mists that enshrouded the Gulf of Tonkin. For a time, the ghost of Vietnam retreated into hibernation.

Unfortunately, this withdrawal has been brief; it has returned with Iraq.

Typical of Vietnam's legacy, people are quarreling over its renewed invocation. Neoconservatives and supporters of the war deny its relevance and seek to banish it. To Richard Perle, then Chairman of the Defense Policy Board and a leader in the neoconservative movement, the Saddam Hussein regime was "a house of cards" that would "collapse at the first whiff of gunpowder."[39] Thus, there would be no Vietnam lurking in Baghdad. Paul Wolfowitz, Donald Rumsfeld's deputy secretary of defense, also saw no Vietnam in Iraq. His advice to Bush was reassuring, "There is nothing to stop you from seizing it."[40] Bush's more sober response, nevertheless, had more of World War II in it than of Vietnam: "Defeating two enemies is difficult, but we will do it."[41]

Despite these denials, Iraq war critics have seized upon the Vietnam analogy. Its value to them is in the simple message it conveys: defeat. To syndicated columnist Maureen Dowd, the 28 June 2004 transfer of power to the Allawi interim regime and the hurried departure of L. Paul Bremer from Baghdad's Green Zone reminded her of the helicopter evacuation of the American embassy in Saigon.[42] The very invocation of this image, of course, was a prediction.[43]

THE ERRANT GHOST VS. THE REALITY OF VIETNAM (Argument Four)

With two of the three arguments for the Iraq War mired in controversy, antiwar opponents have summoned the ghost of Vietnam to deliver this conflict its deathblow. As a talisman of defeat, Vietnam is advanced as proof that America cannot win "Third World Wars." To invoke Vietnam is to project lists of failures from that war that appear to apply to whatever new war is in question. Recently, Christian Appy published his list in a featured article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* titled "The Ghosts of War":

> We failed for many reasons, but mostly because the non-Communist government we supported never had the widespread support of its own people and because our military policies, which included the dropping of more bombs than have ever been dropped on any country and the ultimate killing of at least two million Vietnamese, only served to stiffen opposition to our intervention.[44]

From among the numerous invocations of Vietnam, I have focused on Appy's here because his is the only one to explicitly invoke Vietnam as a "ghost." It is instructive, then, to see what about Vietnam he highlights as a clairvoyant warning of similar defeat in Iraq. These lists, of course, offer inspiration to the Baathist insurgents and *al-Qaeda* bombers in Iraq, even as they urge Americans, once again, to quit. But to glibly invoke such lists today is problematic. To begin with, these lists are mostly wrong. Further, and more to the point, this time the US cannot quit. Vietnam has been superseded in Iraq by a more powerful metaphor.

There is no denying that it was fleeing American civilians who were plucked from the rooftop of the American Embassy in Saigon in April 1975, and that the US was defeated. But it was not defeated for most of the reasons that gave birth to Vietnam's errant ghost. For one thing, in all of the lists of failures none of them cites Vietnam as a military defeat for the United States. By the time Saigon fell, American forces had been out of Vietnam for two years. Also, contrary to what was implied in Appy's statement, the bombing was not responsible for the two million deaths. Most of the bombing fell in support of combat operations in South Vietnam. Another third of the tonnage was directed at troop movements and supply convoys along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos. For all the publicity of the bombing in North Vietnam, total casualties in the North amounted to only 65,000 of this two million total.[45]

But, as Harry Summers and others have conceded, this war was not decided on the battlefield,[46] at least not until its ignominious end in 1975. What is surprising is that, despite Appy's statement, much had been accomplished politically in South Vietnam. A Constitutional Assembly was popularly elected in 1966. Local and national legislative elections were held. President Nguyen Van Thieu won two national presidential elections, one in 1967 and one in 1971. None of this occurred without problems or controversies, but South Vietnam did have its own non-communist political system in place. It is nevertheless true that communists were barred from participating in this system, and this failure to co-opt them into the process was a major mistake, one, interestingly enough, that is not being repeated in Iraq.[47] And, in the face of a continued communist insurgency and two massive invasions by North Vietnamese conventional armed forces — in 1968 and 1972 — this system did require sustaining American support.[48]

Indeed, as was mentioned earlier, this whole system delivered a stinging defeat to communist guerrilla forces in the Tet Offensive of 1968. More than a military defeat, the Saigon government and US forces essentially destroyed the communist insurgency by decimating its infrastructure. As a revolution, the communist cause was lost in Tet.[49] Indeed, the official communist Vietnamese account of the war conceded the significant failings of this assault, while gratefully acknowledging that the offensive turned the tide for the American antiwar movement. For example, this account admitted that "our preparations … were insufficient . . .. We were subjective in our assessments . . . of the mass political forces in the urban areas . . .. Our plan for military attacks was too simplistic … [and] the battle did not progress favorably for our side."[50] When US and South Vietnamese forces beat back a subsequent fully conventional North Vietnamese invasion in 1972, the follow-on Paris Peace Agreement of 1973 represented an opportunity for a stable political and military arrangement in the South. In rectifying the mistake cited above, the agreement called for the incorporation of the communists into the system through the establishment of a National Council for Reconciliation and Concord. US forces had honorably fulfilled their mission.

But over the two years following the US troop withdrawals, the American public and Congress tired of the war that continued on in South Vietnam. Despite the peace agreement, both sides continued fighting, communist forces violated re-supply portions of the agreement and President Thieu refused to establish the Council for Reconciliation and Concord. The US Congress, for its part, blocked the use of air power in Cambodia in 1973 and "legislated a ban" on any further US combat role in Indochina in 1974.[51] President Nixon, crippled by the Watergate scandal, lost all political capital for independent executive action. His successor, Gerald Ford, was unable to bestir the American public and arouse the Congress on an Easter recess to stage any kind of rescue of a crumbling Saigon regime, which fell to a relentless final communist "shock and awe" offensive in March and April 1975. This collapsed American resolve was the ultimate domino that led to the embassy roof evacuations in Saigon.[52]

It was an ironic end because, as we have seen in the Gulf War, Kosovo, and Iraq, "shock and awe" has become an American specialty. As I concluded in an earlier work on Vietnam:

> Thus, in losing a people's war, the communists went on to win the war itself. But in adopting a conventional war strategy, they won by a means they should have lost. The United States, on the other hand, won a war it thought it lost, and lost by default what it could have won.[53]

By this I meant that the communist revolutionary strategy of people's war was destroyed in the defeat of communist forces in the Tet Offensive of 1968, when Southern guerrillas were decimated. When the communists rebuilt their forces afterwards, they were reconstituted primarily from North Vietnamese soldiers who came south as conventional military units. It was these conventional forces that mounted the successful offensive of 1975, not the revolutionary guerrillas who rose up at Tet. Thus, as a revolution, the communist insurgency had been defeated. The communists won in 1975 only as one conventional army overwhelming another conventional army. The United States never gave itself credit for defeating this revolution in 1968 and certainly could have thwarted this conventional communist victory in 1975. This was its "default." What was supposed to have been so compelling about Vietnam in communist iconography was how a national revolutionary movement overcame the conventional forces of the capitalist superpower. But the Viet Cong revolution was, in fact, destroyed, and the conventional forces that were defeated, thanks to Congressional proscriptions, were not American.[54]

Indeed, this line of reasoning — that the communist defeat at Tet forced a switch to conventional North Vietnamese troops as the only remaining path to victory — is confirmed by the memoir of Truong Nhu Tang, a high-level southern Viet Cong leader, who lamented this passage of control after Tet to "the Hanoi leadership":

> It is a major irony of the Vietnamese war that our propaganda transformed this military debacle into a brilliant victory . . .. The truth was that Tet cost us half our forces. Our losses were so immense that we were simply unable to replace them with new recruits. One consequence was that the Hanoi leadership began to move unprecedented numbers of troops into the South, giving them a new and much more dominant position in NLF [National Liberation Front] deliberations.[55]

The failure of Vietnam, then, did not lie in any of the lists invoked by the antiwar community. At root, the defeat in Vietnam was something of a self-inflicted wound. It is this that has made it fester for so long, and turned the legacy of this war into a nightmare and such a ubiquitous ghost. In fact, then, Vietnam was not much of a defeat for the United States and has become a very mistaken ghost. By not much of a defeat, I mean really that it was not much of victory a for Hanoi: it was in terms of its successful "liberation" of Vietnam under a unified communist regime but not in terms of what is generalizable or replicable from this liberation. Hanoi's revolution failed in South Vietnam and its conventional victory was only against the South Vietnamese military, a victory that was serendipitously enabled by South Vietnamese President Thieu's mistakes, the temporary political loss of US presidential power in the scandal of Watergate, and in the petulant inaction of the US Congress. In other words, this defeat in Vietnam arose from a set of case-specific, unique circumstances that should not carry any generalizeable message of automatic replication to Iraq. In a word, the ghost of this defeat is an illusion; its reality is far more complex. These complexities certainly contain the dangers of repeating some of the mistakes made in Vietnam in Iraq, but they also contain lessons and opportunities for another outcome.

CONCLUSION: DISPELLING THE GHOST — AND THE DANGER (Argument Five)

Beyond Vietnam being a mistaken ghost, there is a strategic difference between Vietnam and Iraq. In a seminal article on military interventions in countries like Vietnam, Andrew Mack termed these conflicts "asymmetric." By this he meant that for the target society, the war was the central and single fact of its national existence. For the intervening state, however, there were two arenas to the war: the one in the target society to be sure, but there was also the second arena in the home society of the intervening state. What made these conflicts asymmetric was that the war was total for the target society, but was not for the intervening state. In fact, "why big nations lose small wars" lay in the dynamic of the dilemma that the more vigorously the intervention was prosecuted, the more likely it would sap the political will in the home society; but, the less the intervener did because of this, the more likely it would lose.[56] This, of course, is why the American public was, and is, the ultimate domino.

The strategic difference between Iraq and Vietnam is simply this: Vietnam and the other interventions of the Cold War were ventures we could safely abandon. We could leave the target society a wreck in terms of Secretary of State Colin Powell's pottery barn metaphor without suffering any consequences at home. After all, the falling dominoes of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos did not follow us home.[57] As Niall Ferguson has observed, "Americans themselves were able to walk away from [this] wreckage of 'containment' . . . [because] from the point of view of American national security, Communists in developing countries proved to be relatively harmless."[58] For all of its costs in blood, treasure, and civic trauma, Vietnam — in terms of the Cold War — was still a "sideshow" to the strategic challenge of the deterrence of nuclear war with the Soviet Union and the containment of its perceived expansionist threat in Western Europe.

In any defeat or withdrawal from Iraq, however, Americans will face consequences at home. In Iraq, there is another analogy operating besides Vietnam; namely, Pearl Harbor. 9/11 is the Pearl Harbor of the twenty-first century. Both events ignited world wars. In this world war, as President Bush correctly warned, there are no safe harbors — not even in the United States. Indeed, the recently declassified conclusions of the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) of April 2006 judged that Iraq "has become the 'cause celebre' for jihadists," and that "perceived jihadist success there [in Iraq] would inspire more fighters to continue the fight elsewhere," such as to "the important venue" of Europe, and even to posing an "operational threat" to the American homeland.[59]

Hence, whether or not the invasion of Iraq was a mistake leading to a quagmire like Vietnam is now a *tactical* question (on the order of, say, whether it was a mistake for the British to invade Gallipolli in World War I, or whether the US should have opened up a second front in Europe earlier in World War II, or whether it would have been better to have invaded the Japanese homeland instead of resorting to the atomic bomb). However interesting these tactical questions are (and the studies that flow from these questions are endless), the plain truth is that Iraq has been *strategically* engulfed by the War on Terror.[60] At the start of this war, the regime of Saddam Hussein did harbor congeries of terrorists, such as, for example, the group responsible for the *Achille Lauro* hijacking, cells of the *Hezbollah* organization that operates in Lebanon, an enclave of *Anser al-Islam* (an *al-Qaeda* affiliate) in Northern Iraq, and the retired, but once vicious, Abu Nidal. And, before the war, Hussein's contacts with *al-Qaeda* had been growing. Though the *9/11 Commission Report* concluded there was no "operational" connection between the two in the 9/11 attacks, there were several contacts, despite the gulf between the secularist Saddam and the Islamist bin Laden. The commission reported that when bin Laden had to leave Sudan, Saddam Hussein offered him sanctuary in Iraq. Bin Laden opted for Afghanistan instead. In a subsequent meeting in 1998, *al-Qaeda* representatives requested help in procuring chemical weapons. This time it was Saddam who demurred.[61]

In the current fighting in Iraq, however, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian confederate of Osama bin Laden, joined the fray full force.[62] Zarqawi trained in Afghanistan with bin Laden and was one of the terrorists on the lam under Saddam Hussein's protection at the time of the US invasion of Iraq. Along with Baathist regime remnants, Zarqawi led the foreign fighter contingent of the Iraqi insurgency. In October 2004, Zarqawi professed his fealty to bin Laden, proclaiming that he was "the best leader for Islam's armies against all infidels and apostates."[63] In December 2004, bin Laden accepted Zarqawi's pledge, "We have been pleased that they responded to God's and his prophet's order for unity, and we in al-Qaeda welcome their unity with us."[64] In fact, the April 2006 National Intelligence Estimate report acknowledged that *al-Qaeda*, through this merger, "is exploiting the situation in Iraq to attract new recruits and donors and to maintain its leadership role." Given this, the report further warned that "Should al-Zarqawi continue to evade capture . . . he could broaden his appeal and present a global threat."[65] Fortunately, this threat ended when Zarqawi perished in a US air strike in Barqouba, Iraq, on 7 June 2006.

This strategic fusion, or operational linkage, when viewed from the other side, makes Baghdad the ultimate prize of this now joined "double war." For Osama bin Laden, final victory lies in the restoration of the Muslim Empire, whose fabled capital was the "Caliphate of Baghdad." President Bush, on the other hand, seeks to slay this terrorist dragon through the countervailing example of a democratic beacon from this same Baghdad. In this post 9/11 War on Terror, what Eliot Cohen has called World War IV,[66] Baghdad has become the Berlin of this new epic struggle. Unlike Vietnam in the Cold War, then, Iraq is the pivot, not the periphery.

In fine, Baghdad is the vortex to the geopolitics of the War on Terror. Though an American withdrawal is not likely to instantly bring Zarqawi's fanatics and bin Laden's minions to power in Iraq, such a withdrawal is likely to upset the dominant position of the Shi'ites versus the Sunnis. Desperate Shi'ites are likely to turn to Iran for help. Any Iranian intervention in Iraq is likely to provoke the Jordanians, Saudis, Egyptians, and certainly the Israelis. And this scenario will surely bring in the Turks to quash any Kurdish bid for independence. Regardless of the scenario, any prolonged regional fighting in the Persian Gulf will send oil prices through the roof. In all this chaos, if Osama bin Laden was emboldened by the small American withdrawal from Somalia in 1993, one can only imagine the scale of his daring from a big American withdrawal from Iraq.[67]

What was asymmetrical in Vietnam has become symmetrical in Iraq. There were two separate arenas to the war in Vietnam. By the collapse of American will in Vietnam, the American intervention was lost – "over there." But Iraq's analogously nebulous Gulf of Tonkin origins were preceded by the vividly clear Pearl Harbor of 9/11 – "over here." The dominoes in New York and Washington, DC, fell at the beginning. There is no "over there" to this war. In

this war of pre-emption, unlike the containment lines of the Cold War in Europe, the defense lines of Boston in this war lie in Baghdad. From Saigon, there still stirs the haunting ghost of the memory of a collapsed American will. This ghost, however, must be dispelled because Iraq has become the Vietnam War we cannot afford to lose. "Staying the course," means seeing this war through to some form of homegrown representative government in Baghdad.[68]

Endnotes

1. Cited by Liz Sidoti, "Rumsfeld comes under attack . . .," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 24 June 2005, p. A1.
2. This article, then, complements Stephen Biddle's recent piece in *Foreign Affairs*. Biddle contends that the two cases are distinguished by fundamentally different politics so that solutions from one case to the other are not analogous. Vietnam was an insurgency driven by a Maoist People's War, whereas the current insurgency in Iraq stems from inter-communal rivalries and hostilities. My article focuses on the falsities of the Vietnam analogy itself and on the different strategic environments of the Cold War versus the War on Terror. See Stephen Biddle, "Seeing Baghdad, Thinking Saigon," *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 2 (March/April 2006), pp. 2-15.
3. Bartholomew Sullivan, "The Road from Tet to Fallujah — Vietnam, Iraq: How Alike are They?," *The Commercial Appeal* (Memphis, TN), 30 May 2004, p. B3; William B. Bader, "From Vietnam to Iraq: Pretext and Precedent," *International Herald Tribune* (Washington), 28 August 2004, p. 8: Stanley I. Kutler, "Why have we landed in Vietnam again," *Wisconsin State Journal* (Madison, WI), 5 September 2004, p. B2; and Scott Kraus, "Disabled vet, former lawmaker campaigns for Kerry in Whitehall, Max Cleland says Iraq is developing into another Vietnam war," *The Morning Call* (Allentown, PA), 18 September 2004, p. A2. A positive reference to Vietnam is Jules Crittendon, "Vietnam, Iraq are battles in long struggle for freedom," *The Boston Herald*, 30 May 2004, p. O25. Another explicit, and more thorough, consideration of the parallels between Iraq and Vietnam, mostly to carefully reject them (as does this article) is Jeffrey Record and W. Andrew Terrill, "Iraq and Vietnam: Differences, Similarities, and Insights," *Strategic Studies Institute* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College, May 2004).
4. "Polling Report.com: Iraq," at http://www.pollingreport.com/iraq.htm (accessed 25 April 2006).
5. Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin, 2006), p. 129.
6. Bob Woodward, *State of Denial* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), p. 167. Taken together, the indexes of both books contain 47 references to Vietnam. In tracking them all down, only two of them are positive in that they mentioned good things done in Vietnam. All the rest are axiomatically negative references to Vietnam as a defeat. See Ibid., p. 557; and Ricks, *Fiasco*, p. 481.
7. General Colin Powell first put his doctrine into practice in the Just Cause operation in Panama in 1989-1990. See Bob Woodward, *The Commanders* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), pp. 166-71. The phrase, "shock and awe," however, belongs to Donald Rumsfeld. See Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York: Simon and Schuster), p. 102. Earlier, the phrase circulated through Pentagon corridors from Harlan Ulman. Personal communication with Steven Metz of the US Army War College, 25 April 2006.
8. For a fuller discussion of these local pitfalls, see Timothy J. Lomperis, "The Perils of Seduction: Intervention From the Other End," *The Journal of Conflict Studies* 22, no. 2 (Fall 2002), pp. 5-26.
9. Neil Sheehan, comp., *The Pentagon Papers as published by The New York Times* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), pp. 142-43.

10. Leslie H. Gelb with Richard K. Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1979), pp. 363-69. This theme is echoed by Paul M. Kattenburg, *The Vietnam Trauma in American Foreign Policy, 1945-1974* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1980), pp. 45-62.
11. For a good overview of these factors in Iraqi society, see Eric Davis, "Democracy's Prospect in Iraq," *Foreign Policy Research Institute: E-Notes* (30 June 2004), pp. 1-6, at http://www.fpri.org (accessed 1 July 2004). More thorough analyses are contained in Ahmed S. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); and Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied* (Ithaca, NY: Columbia University Press, 2003). For comprehensive treatments of the US record in nation building, see James Dobbins, et al., *America's Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2003); Michael J. Sullivan, *American Adventurism Abroad: 30 Invasions, Interventions, and Regime Changes Since WW II* (New York: Preager, 2004); and Francis Fukuyama, ed., *Nation-Building: Beyond Afghanistan and Iraq* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).
12. One of the best analyses of such a broad-based polity in South Vietnam is Samuel P. Huntington, "The Bases of Accommodation," *Foreign Affairs* 46, no. 4 (July 1968), pp. 642-57.
13. At issue is the ire of the State Department over the rise of the Campaign Planning Committee and Special Plans Office in the Pentagon headed by Undersecretary of Defense Douglas Feith that has superseded State's own Future of Iraq project. See Melanie Kirkpatrick, "Analyze This: Clear Ideas Versus Foggy Bottom," *Wall Street Journal*, 5 August 2003, pp. 1-2 (Laurie Mylroie E-mail list, sam11@erols.com, accessed 8 June 2003. A useful account of the steps and missteps taken during the tenure of the Coalition Provisional Authority is Larry Diamond, "What Went Wrong In Iraq," *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 5 (Sep/Oct 2004), pp. 34-56. L. Paul Bremer, as the head of the CPA, has vigorously defended himself in *My Year in Iraq* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006). In my opinion, the most insightful work on the lessons of the aftermath of the Iraq War and the insurgency in which we are now embroiled is by David Hendrickson and Robert Tucker. In both acknowledging and cataloguing the several mistakes that have been surfaced in the literature, they caution that the alternatives might not have been better. See David C. Hendrickson and Robert W. Tucker, "Revisions in Need of Revising: What Went Wrong in the Iraq War," *Strategic Studies Institute* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College, December 2005).
14. Woodward, *State of Denial*, pp. 206-12; and Ricks, *Fiasco*, pp. 149-89.
15. David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett, 1969), p. 794. For a closer look at the perils of the various sets of numbers used to show progress in Vietnam, see Chester L. Cooper, *The Lost Crusade: America in Vietnam* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1970), pp. 422-25; and Tim Lomperis, *The War Everyone Lost — And Won: America's Intervention in Viet Nam's Twin Struggles*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1993), pp. 70-73.
16. Indeed, a recent account of this uprising reports that the casualties suffered by al-Sadr's militia ran into the thousands, and that is why the uprising ended. Contra Vietnam, attrition, at least this once, worked. See Mark Etherington, *Revolt on the Tigris: The Al-Sadr Uprising and the Governing of Iraq* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 233.
17. "Iraq's Reconstruction: Dangerous, unpredictable," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 2 July 2004, p. B6.
18. Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, rev. ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), p. 527.
19. Thomas F. Eagleton, "What do we say to the Mothers," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 22 July 2004, p. B7.
20. "Gore Says Bush Lied," *The Washington Post*, 25 June 2004, at www.Washingtonpost.com (accessed 7 July 2004).

21. The reports from the various intelligence commissions of inquiry — the Senate Intelligence Committee, the 9/11 Commission, and the Butler Commission in England — are not likely to settle these disputes. The first two commissions are rather critical of the adequacy of the intelligence supporting the war, but the Butler Commission is more supportive. In a bizarre twist to these reports, one of the chief "factoids" that Bush has been criticized for in "misleading" the Congress, the country, and the world was the "false" reports of Iraq seeking uranium from Niger. Both the Butler Commission and the Senate Intelligence Committee are now conceding that these reports are actually "well-founded." See Jonathan S. Landay and James Kuhnhenn, "Prewar intelligence wrong, panel says," *The Charlotte (NC) Observer*, 10 July 2004, pp. 1A, 4A; James Kuhnhenn, "Report disputes assertions about uranium deal," *The Charlotte (NC) Observer*, 10 July 2004, p. 4A; and William Safire, "Uranium claim warrants closer inspection," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 20 July 2004, p. B7.

    Further adding to this confusion are the unconfirmed reports that Saddam Hussein spirited these weapons out of Iraq into Syria at the last minute. See Eli Lake, "House Reopens Issue of Iraq's WMD," *The New York Sun*, 3 February 2006, p 3, at http//:www.Nysun.com/article/2700 (accessed 6 February 2006). Indeed, Michael Gordon and General Bernard Trainor, in their harsh criticism of the Bush administration's failure to deploy enough troops after the fall of Baghdad, concede that US forces did not secure hundreds of suspected WMD sites (sites where Saddam Hussein had denied access to the reconstituted UN inspectors of late 2002) and failed to seal the porous borders with Iran and Syria. See Michael R. Gordon and General Bernard Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (New York: Random House, 2006), p. 504. Thus, even though subsequent postwar inspectors from the US Army's Iraq Survey Group found no weapons at these sites, it cannot be stated that WMDs were not at some of these sites earlier.

22. *The Deulfer Report*, delivered in September 2004, made clear that Saddam Hussein intended to resume his WMD program after the lifting of UN sanctions, a program that by late 2002 was in a shambles. Deulfer's Iraq Survey Group uncovered covert chemical weapons laboratories and designs for long-range missiles fitted with chemical warheads. See Charles Deulfer, Special Advisor to the DCI on Iraq's WMD, "Transmittal Message," *Comprehensive Report* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 30 September 2004), at http.//www.cia.gov/cia/reports/iraq_wmd_2004/index.html (accessed 13 December 2004). Thus, there was a threat, but it was not imminent. Given all this controversy, President Bush's proclaimed certitude on this question was misleading. Whether it was deliberate or born of cherished pre-dispositional beliefs, in my view, must await further research.

23. Two of the most prominent books in this controversy are Joseph C. Goulden, *Truth is the First Casualty: The Gulf of Tonkin Affair — Illusion and Reality* (Chicago: Rand-McNally, 1969); and Eugene G. Windchey, *Tonkin Gulf* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971). Because of his access to previously classified materials, Professor Moise was able to "settle" this dispute. See Edwin Moise, *Tonkin Gulf: The Escalation of the Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

24. "Polling Report.com: Iraq."

25. As early as 1965, when US combat units first set foot in Vietnam, a group of scholars issued their warnings of impending disaster. See Marvin E. Gettleman, ed., *Vietnam: History, Documents, and Opinions on a Major World Crisis* (New York: Fawcett Publications, 1965). Similarly on Iraq, a group of distinguished scholars have offered their opinions of a looming debacle. See Demetrious James Caraley, ed., *American Hegemony: Preventive War, Iraq and Imposing Democracy* (New York: The Academy of Political Science, 2004).

26. "Arms Policy: Farewell to Nixon Doctrine," *Washington Post*, 13 December 1979, p. A33.

27. For such a celebration of the American defeat in Vietnam, see Michael T. Klare and Peter Kornbluh, eds., *Low Intensity Warfare: Counterinsurgency, Proinsurgency, and Antiterrorism in the Eighties* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), pp. 49-80.

28. Richard Nixon, *No More Vietnams* (New York: Arbor House, 1985), pp. 13, 212.

29. For elaboration of the changes effected by the Goldwater-Nichols Act, see James Locher, "Organization and Management," in Joseph Kruzel, ed., *American Defense Annual, 1988-89* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1988), pp. 171-90. The most vicious of these Vietnam debates was between the Army (represented by General Westmoreland) and the Marines (led by the caustic General Walt) over control of US forces in I Corps (the northernmost sector in South Vietnam). Walt wanted US forces to break up into small units to better engage guerrilla forces, while Westmoreland worried that such dispersals would make US forces vulnerable to conventional assaults from regular North Vietnamese army units. See William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976); and Lewis W. Walt, *Strange War, Strange Strategy: A General's Report on Vietnam* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1970). In my opinion, as well as most of the authors of this reform bill, both men were right. Rather than leaving this unresolved, what was needed was an integrated strategy. The bill's supporters hoped to achieve unity in wartime both within the military and between the military leaders and their civilian superiors.
30. This strategy was a deliberate commitment to a military geared to fighting heavy conventional war, and to avoid future counterinsurgencies like Vietnam. Indeed, Steven Metz, of the US Army War College, contends that the army, in particular, allowed its counterinsurgency capabilities to atrophy. Personal communication, 25 April 2006. This is echoed by Thomas Ricks, who attributed this willful ignorance to "a repugnance, after the fall of Saigon, for dwelling on unconventional operations." See Ricks, *Fiasco*, p. 267.
31. Timothy J. Lomperis, *From People's War to People's Rule: Insurgency, Intervention, and the Lessons of Vietnam* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), p. 4.
32. Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, p. 168.
33. Maureen Dowd, "A Renewed Bush Confronts Old Problems," *Raleigh (NC) News and Observer*, 2 March 1991, p. 1A.
34. Lomperis, *The War Everyone Lost — And Won*, p. xviii. This is my interpretation of the hesitation of the elder President Bush, but it can also be argued that his objectives were more limited and that he drew up at these rivers because his own "mission [was] accomplished."
35. The interpretation of the Tet Offensive has become the pivotal analytical controversy in the scholarship on the Vietnam War. This view that Johnson's fundamental misprision of what were both a military and a political triumph for the American war effort, and that this tragically spawned the ultimate American defeat has been labeled revisionist in the historiography of the Vietnam War. See Robert A. Devine, "Vietnam Reconsidered," *Diplomatic History* 12, no. 1 (Winter 1988), pp. 79-93. I advance this revisionist point specifically about Tet in "Giap's Dream, Westmoreland's Nightmare," *Parameters* 18, no. 2 (June 1988), pp. 18-33. I am certainly not alone in advancing this thesis. For two other major works that argue that Tet was a massive strategic defeat for the communists that destroyed their southern revolution, see Peter Braestrup, *Big Story*, 2 vols. (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1977); and Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, pp. 528-82. One well-argued counter work contends that Tet was not a turning point; it was just part of the inexorable communist path to victory. See Ronald H. Spector, *After TET: The Bloodiest Year in Vietnam* (New York: The Free Press, 1993).
36. Mark Bowden, *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1999), pp. 32, 311, 327, 331, and 333. In fairness, Clinton inherited the Somali intervention from the elder Bush and was never comfortable with it. See Ray Murphy, "The Political and Diplomatic Background to the Establishment of UNIFIL in Lebanon and the UNITAF and UNOSOM Missions in Somalia," *The Journal of Conflict Studies* 22, no. 2 (Fall 2002), p. 41.
37. The *9/11 Commission Report* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), p. 48.
38. General Wesley K. Clark, *Waging Modern War: Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Future of Combat* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), pp. 268-324 and 436-37.
39. "Richard Perle: A house of cards," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 1 April 2003, p. B6.
40. Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, p. 22.

41. Ibid., p. 191.
42. Maureen Dowd, "Transfer of power suggests there wasn't any power to transfer," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 2 July 2004, p. B7.
43. One leading antiwar newspaper has summoned the Vietnam analogy to virtually all of its weekly editorials against the Iraq war. In one of the most recent examples, in decrying the rosily optimistic official statements of progress, the paper intones: "All of these remarks recall the '5 o'clock Follies' that U.S. commanders used to hold every afternoon in Saigon . . .. Most of us remember how that one turned out." See "Iraq: Fatigue sets in," *Saint Louis Post-Dispatch*, 7 June 2005, p. D8.
44. Christian G. Appy, "The Ghosts of War," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, sec. B, 9 July 2004, p. B12.
45. For further breakdowns of the bombing in Indochina, see Lomperis, *From People's War to People's Rule*, pp. 260, 261, and 402. The figure of 65,000 is taken from the careful estimates of Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 451.
46. He tells the story of the North Vietnamese officer who acknowledged that his forces had not won a single battle against American troops, but then said that this was "irrelevant." See Harry G. Summers, Jr., *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (New York: Dell, 1984), p. 21.
47. Even though Vietnam is seen as analogous to Iraq by a large segment of the American public, policy makers are giving evidence of drawing a positive lesson from this mistake in Vietnam by developing a much more inclusive political process in Iraq. The three elections in Iraq in 2005 in January, October, and December has seen a process in which all three communities in Iraq, including the disaffected Sunnis, have become full participants in the process. See Timothy J. Lomperis, "To a Baghdad Victory via Saigon: How the Wrong Nation Building Strategy That Failed in Vietnam Can be Righted to Succeed in Iraq," *World Affairs* 168, no. 4 (Spring 2006), pp. 147-57.
48. A thorough and balanced assessment of the extensive nation building efforts in South Vietnam is Allan E. Goodman, *Politics in War: The Bases of Political Community in South Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973).
49. For further support of this "revisionist" argument from a leading scholar of Asian revolution, see Chalmers Johnson, *Autopsy on People's War* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973).
50. The Military Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954-1975*, trans. Merle L. Pribbenow (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002), p. 224.
51. Gelb, *The Irony of Vietnam*, p. 351.
52. As Leslie Gelb concluded: "U.S. politics — public support and opposition to the war — was to be the key stress point . . .. Thus American public opinion was the essential domino." See Ibid., p. 332.
53. Lomperis, *The War Everyone Lost — And Won*, p. 176.
54. These are the points I set forth in "Giap's Dream, Westmoreland's Nightmare," pp. 18-33.
55. Truong Nhu Tang, *A Vietcong Memoir* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985), p. 32.
56. Andrew J.R. Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict," *World Politics* 27, no. 2 (January 1975), pp. 175-201.
57. In tracing why these dominoes fell, but not others, see George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, 2nd ed. (New York: Random House, 1986), pp. 268-72.

58. Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 107. I have taken the liberty of reversing the two clauses of the second sentence.

59. Office of the Director of National Intelligence, "Declassified Key Judgments of the National Intelligence Estimate 'Trends in Global Terrorism: Implications for the United States' dated April 2006," pp. 1, 2, at http://www.dni.gov/press_releases/cover.pdf (accessed 27 September 2006).

60. By referring to these objections to the war as tactical, I do not intend to be dismissive of the antiwar case against the Bush administration. In moral terms, the President's failure to demonstrate an imminent threat from Saddam Hussein and show an operational linkage between Iraq and the 9/11 attacks themselves, despite strong rhetoric that asserted this threat and linkage anyway, has certainly given Bush a credibility problem reminiscent of that of President Johnson over Vietnam. Recent reports from the "Downing Street Memo" that Bush had been planning for a war at least since the summer of 2002, while claiming that the decision to war came only as a last resort, would not be the scandal that it has risen to in some quarters, if he had been more forthright, that is, more qualified at the least, in this rhetoric. See "Democrat plans forum on war memo," *Saint Louis Post-Dispatch*, 16 June 2005, p. A14.

61. *The 9/11 Commission Report*, pp. 61, 64-67.

62. For a profile of Zarqawi that makes clear his "operational" linkage with *al-Qaeda*, see Jeffrey Gettleman, "Zarqawi's Journey: From Dropout to Prisoner to an Insurgent Leader in Iraq," *The New York Times,* 13 July 2004, p. A8. For a full biography, see Jean-Charles Brisard, *Zarqawi* (New York: Other Press, 2005).

63. Rawya Rageh, "Militant group vows loyalty to bin Laden," *Saint Louis Post-Dispatch*, 18 October 2004, p. A1.

64. "Tape, apparently from bin Laden, praises leader of insurgents in Iraq," *Saint Louis Post-Dispatch*, 26 December 2004, p. A2.

65. Office of the Director of National Intelligence, p. 3.

66. Cited in Ashley J. Tellis, "Assessing America's War on Terror: Confronting Insurgency, Cementing Primacy," *NBR Analysis* 15, no. 4 (December 2004), p. 63.

67. For all his scathing criticisms of the Bush administration in Iraq, Thomas Ricks outlines a set of equally grim and concrete scenarios should the US withdraw from Iraq. He concludes, "inside all these problems there lies a major victory for President Bush . . .. Like it or not, the U.S. government through his actions has been tethered to Iraq . . . as never before . . .. The stakes are simply too high to let Iraq become the sanctuary for anti-U.S. terrorists." See Ricks, *Fiasco*, pp. 433-39. Quote is from p. 433.

68. In what is still a cogent analysis of the sources of political legitimacy in the Arab world, Michael Hudson makes a strong case for the importance of instituting processes of accommodation in modern representative institutions in the Middle East that incorporate features of the traditional political cultures. His warning is that doing so will be a slow, but not impossible, journey because of what he terms the "mosaic" feature of Arab Societies (the pull between conflicting forces of traditional resistance and the attractions of modernization). See Michael Hudson, *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), pp. 7-30.