

A QUESTION OF WAR

Old Colonels (and even Generals) sometimes rationalize the whys and wherefores of war and what might have been. It may be good therapy but does not change history. Both Korea and Vietnam could have been won by the west if they had the proper strategy, will, and commitment, but they did not. Now we are fraught with another 'war' whose end is not in sight and following a suspect strategy.

"Joe, history reminds that anything short of total victory in war can create the seeds of a new one. WWI ended in an Armistice between the antagonists but political and economic pressure was put on the Germans and their allies (losing land possessions and paying reparations to the 'victors') -spawning WWII!"

"You're right Don but thankfully the strategy developed by Roosevelt-Churchill in the darkest days of WWII (the early victories by the Germans, the Japanese attack of Pearl Harbor) led to the strategy of Unconditional Surrender against these behemoths. Victory ultimately was total, and despite some concerns a brutal Germany and Japan became docile...with no post-war insurgency. This was not the way of the Korean and Vietnam War where fear of WWIII, a counter-tactic of winning hearts and minds tended to collectively stall any hope of total victory. These were proxy-wars between the major antagonists, the US and the Soviet Union. A quasi-political and military insurgency between these two was on-going."

These two old soldiers, ruminating about those wars and what affect they had on the Gulf Wars -perhaps a continuum (a continuous whole whose parts cannot be separated). Are they suggesting or inferring that the two Gulf Wars are connected and an incomplete strategy in the first led to the second? Let us find out!

"Don, do you think we should have gone all the way in Gulf War I, destroyed the Republican Guard and taken Baghdad, you know this flies in the face of UN support, albeit freeing of Kuwait and unsure allegiance of Arabs in the coalition!"

"Joe, of course, I do -and, of course, one could argue that our hindsight is clairvoyant only because we have Gulf War II to contend with- but I wish we had, but we didn't."

"Off the top of my head a solution for the never-ending thing in Iraq has to be placed in the perspective of what President Bush calls the 'War against Terrorists and those who harbor them.' We are not privy to top secret planning but I would assume that the President's war cabinet has defined this vague and glittering generality more specifically. Appears we not only have an Iraqi problem but what next? Certainly Iran, Syria and some other volatile Islamic state needs addressing and even a Declaration of War could be on the agenda. Settling Iraq has to be in the guise of operations versus militant Islam elsewhere."

In the short run, our solution for Iraq should entail: a timetable of no longer than a year with or without more troops, or even a quicker pullout with the proviso of a quick-responsive return if necessary. More troops with an operational punch -assuming an unconditional surrender motif- could emphasize the clearing of all known insurgent controlled areas and the recognition that the insurgency will be defeated, neutralized, and informed on by locals. This punch should include elements of a Sunni-Shiia-Kurd unit as part of the coalition, some other Arab commitment, as well as NATO and US/British troops from other assignments. Total war but short and brutal.

A return of all-out combat may be yesterday's history but it may be the only viable solution to a never-ending war of attrition and uncertain plan of withdrawal.