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Abstract

Along the span of time and history, there are several reasons why certain people or countries would commence a war against one another. Scholars would often state it as an “alter ego principle”, which is possessed naturally by any form of government, given of course, the real disposition of any individual. Culture, like individuals, is different. Wars have started over small differences in religion, government and land boundaries. These are the most common reasons for war. This paper will address the cultural issues from the American wars in Vietnam and Iraq.

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Vietnamese culture was formed by the influence from China rule for approximately 1000 years. This helped create the very strong natural culture from religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism, preserving their ways for generations.

The French first were assisted by financial backing from the United States by paying for approximately 80% of the French campaign against the communist in the 1940's and 1950's. The United States wanted to stop communist rule in Vietnam and promote democracy without putting U. S. forces on the ground or jeopardizing a conflict at the time. The French lost in a major defeat in 1956 that ended most of the support from their country and other countries of the world. In 1960, the United States had about 900 advisors in South Vietnam and in 1963 President John F. Kennedy increased the number to approximately 16,000 advisors to assist in training the South Vietnamese.

In 1964, the President authorized by Congress to take all measures to stop all aggression and attack against U.S. forces because of the Tonkin Gulf Incident where North Vietnam attacked U.S. Navy ships. In 1965, 23,000 advisors were in combat with the South Vietnamese. In 1966, approximately 200,000 U.S. troops had boots on the ground helping train and defend the South Vietnamese.

In 1968, about 525,000 U.S. Troops are on the ground in South Vietnam. While being sympathetic to the Vietnamese way of life and culture, U.S. and South Vietnamese troops are dying because of the nonconventional warfare waged by the North Vietnamese. The North

Vietnamese infiltrated the South by taking up in the ranks of the civilian population and hiding out to go undetected. These tactics allowed the North Vietnamese a chance to gather information and fight without being compromised for a while.

Most of the Tet Offensive occurred in January and February of 1968 when North Vietnamese attacked U.S. and Southern Troops, bases and supply routes. In March 1968, American Soldiers killed 300 Vietnamese villagers in My Lai. President Johnson then ordered bombing in the north to stop. President Johnson was trying to bring peace to the region and to bring some U.S. Troops home.

Peace talks occurred on October 31 in Paris, France between the North and South Vietnamese and Americans. On May 14, 1969, President Richard M. Nixon lays out a Vietnam peace offer for the North Vietnamese with no success. Some U.S. Troops begin pulling out in June of 1969. In September of 1969, 6,000 U.S troops and 1,000 Marines are pulled out of Southeast Asia. In the United States, the public is not satisfied with the civil and war policies of the United States Government and large demonstrations occur all over the country in October of 1969.

Advisors and Soldiers of the 1960's were aware of the cultural differences with the Vietnamese people but had little training to deal with situations they would encounter in the performance of their duties while in Vietnam Laos and Cambodia. U.S. Troops had limited language skills and just enough knowledge of the language to get by or accomplish their missions. The mind set of the Soldiers was the culture was backwards or old, not modern, and needed to step up into the 20th century. Language skills limited the ability of soldiers. They had to rely on interpreters to accurately interpret the meaning of conversations including direction, questioning, and personnel.

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The South Vietnamese people in the country just wanted only to survive and continue their culture and lifestyle as known to them for centuries. War changes the country along with the people involved when the normal activities such as growing a crop for survival or a business.

Providing for a family, culture changes slightly even in the times of war. People still believe in the same religion, governmental process and social groups. People also continue or attempt to carry on with their normal process of life as they have known in the past.

Soldiers are no different from the civilian population attempting to have some type of normalcy in their life from time to time during down time such as playing cards and playing sports activities.

The Vietnam War was a non-conventional war. The United States government tried to win the support of the American public and the people of South Vietnam. This war was about the culture in the form of politics, democracy trying to defeat communism in a country divided by the beliefs or differences in a belief of politics, one trying to become a free nation and the other wanting to control all the country.

The war in Iraq was set decades ago when the Baath party came into control, then later when Saddam Hussein was put into power of the country. The people of Iraq were ruled by fear from a smaller minority group with all the power and control of the country.

The date of September 11, 2001 will stick not only with Americans, but the whole world, as this set forward the war on terror across the world. Other contributors to the war on terror, especially in Iraq, could be global warming and biological weapons shocking the world and apparently helping contribute to the start of this 21st Century war.

Most wars in the past have been started for one of two explicit reasons, power or supremacy. Iraq was not started for either. The United States, along with several other

countries, saw a dictator with several atrocities against the human race. One being the Kurdish people of his own country now supporting terrorist organizations and the other being the rumor or possibility of weapons of mass destruction. Both were various reasons to go to war.

The culture of Iraq is the oldest known recorded civilization to man. Having two of the oldest known cities of the known world Ur and Babylon in the area of Mesopotamia, otherwise known as the cradle of life. Approximately 4000 B.C., the Sumerians ruled the area and developed several areas of the world's culture starting mathematics, writing, and building the first plow for agriculture.

In 1700 B.C., the country was taken over and renamed Babylonia by the Assyrians and King Hammurabi who also started the first known recorded legal code. About 323 B.C., the Persian Empire took over the area and then around 634 A.D., the Arab Muslims took over the area. This is when most people converted to the Muslim religion. In 762 A.D., the city of Bagdad was first established. From 1200A.D. to 1400 A.D., the country was invaded and controlled by the Mongols. Beginning 1600 A.D. until the end of World War I, the Ottoman Turks ruled over the area. The British were put in charge of setting the boundaries of the countries in the area at the end of World War I. Iraq was one of the countries where boundaries were set with no thought of ethnic or cultural differences. A prime example of this is the Kurdish areas of Iraq, Turkey, and Azerbaijan.

The United States' first war with Iraq over the invasion of Kuwait was a short war, but the damage to the cultural artifacts were very severe. Destruction of artifacts and looting of artifacts by civilian population was a great loss to both Iraq and the world.

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The United States, in preparation of the operations in Iraq, set up the military forces from all branches for success with language classes, CD's and books to better inform and equip each individual and unit for knowledge of the culture.

Government Training Aids (GTA's) with cultural information such as ethnic groups, customs, clothes, gestures, social structure, does and don'ts help influence the association between Soldiers and civilian population. The average American Soldier today is better educated on the cultures of the world than any time in the past. This knowledge and open minded thinking of the American forces helps prepare for a better understanding force to deploy anywhere in the world to assist in the smooth operating basics of cultural awareness. American Soldiers on the ground in Iraq help forge the nation by training the Iraq Army police and ensure the safety of groups in areas unstable from ethnic or religious problems.

Working and living with the Iraqi Army, training and doing missions with fellow soldiers in a common cause, the freedom of a nation and the people who only remember the cruel dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, was an honor for me as an American Soldier.

Conclusions

Perhaps there is no definite answer to the question on “truth” and acceptability—since each race, class, religious, or political group and culture have different views and perceptions in life or on any other form of belief. Some may regard these moves as unjust, but it is the society who needs to speak and it is the responsibility of the government to answer their call and act upon it. The power is not only vested in one country alone, or on the wealthiest, or the most popular but all the people of the world. Without allies and without the help of the full force amongst all nations, one country will not be able to succeed.

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