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# Trends. Why the United States Still Hasn't Shaken Its Vietnam Syndrome: The Case of Iraq

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Operation DESERT STORM is often cited as proof that the United States (US) has finally shaken its so-called Vietnam Syndrome. Mimicking the classification approaches of the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-IV and the World Health Organization's International Classification of Diseases, one might define this syndrome as comprising a number of features including a sense of defeatism; lowered self-worth; exacerbation of isolationist tendencies; identity confusion; and feelings of free-floating frustration, anger, and discomfort. In the context of such feature, the military victory by the multinational coalition might well indicate that the syndrome no longer characterizes the US.

However, the most vital feature of the Vietnam Syndrome is not often cited, and the US is still amply characterized by it. This feature embraces the discounting, disregarding, lack of awareness, suppression, and or repression of the essential insight that military activity is but politics by other means--i.e., one of many vehicles to achieve political objectives. Body counts, bomb tonnage, air sorties, and number of successful ground encounters that may well suggest military victory seemed to have little impact--even as some believe they had a negative impact--on the hearts and minds of large segments of the Vietnamese people and the nature of the various South Vietnamese governments.

While Operation DESERT STORM is touted as a great military victory, it has proven to be a long-term political defeat. The staying power of the Saddam Hussein regime and its quest for weapons of mass destruction and regional hegemony through one Bush and two Clinton Administrations, through United Nations inspections, and through the slings and arrows of calumny initiated by many international leaders is just example of this.

Thus, even as political relations between Vietnam and the US continue to improve, residual disease from their former military conflict is alive and well. Whether this suggests combinations of some sort of national dissociative, affective, cognitive, and post-traumatic stress disorders remains to be seen. (Crossette, B., & Myers, S.L. (August 22, 2000). U.N. readies team to check weapons held by the Iraqis. *The New York Times*, pp. A1; A10; Fleming, R.H. (1985). Post Vietnam syndrome: Neurosis or sociosis? *Psychiatry: Journal for the Study of Interpersonal Processes*, 48, 122-123; Kelman, H. C. (1995). Decision making and public discourse in the Gulf War: An assessment of underlying psychological and moral assumptions. *Peace & Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 1, 117-130; Lindy, J. D., & Titchener, J. (1983). "Acts of God and man": Long-term character change in survivors of disasters and the law. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 1, 85-96; Parson, E.R. (1986). Life after death: Vietnam veterans' struggle for meaning and recovery. *Death Studies*, 10, 11-26.) (Keywords: DESERT STORM, Iraq, Politics.)