

An Aversion to War

If there ever was a baby boomer "issue" that has become engrained into the heart and psyche of a generation, it is an aversion to war due to the horrific experience of Vietnam. While a relatively small percentage of surviving baby boomers actually went to and fought in Vietnam, the scar on the national psyche was so deep that it has influenced the way baby boomers have thought about war and how they selected their government representatives for over 30 years.

This is in stark contrast to the way the parents of the Baby Boom generation viewed warfare and the use of the country's military might. Because World War II was such a necessary conflict and winning it would be the difference between a world of freedom or domination by a cruel dictator, that fight had a nobility and a clear cut purpose to it. So when we, as Americans, banded together to defeat Nazi Germany and her allies, it was an act of world changing sacrifice and nobility that shaped that generation. To the parents of baby boomers, warfare in a noble cause was the highest calling of a nation and part of our national pride.

Everything about Vietnam was contrary to that vision. The mission was unclear and the military was not empowered to win decisively as they were in World War II. Some saw Vietnam as a puppet war in several respects. In one way it was a puppet war because the real enemy in Vietnam was not the North Vietnamese but China and Russia were using that conflict, and the Vietcong as puppets to lure the American military into a no win situation and deplete our resources and our will to fight.

Others viewed Vietnam as a puppet conflict to benefit the American military and business interests who were profiting from the conflict. While this is a cynical and harsh way to view a conflict, the distrust of the "military/industrial complex" was prevalent in the minds of a youthful baby boomer generation who saw their brothers and cousins go off to a brutal war which, in their minds, was being conducted to benefit business. Small wonder that many came out of this era bitter and resentful of big business interests. That distrust has surfaced many times over the years and it dominates discussions of modern conflicts America is involved with.

But there has been good come out of the national aversion to war that was the product of the Vietnam conflict. The anti war movement did not result in the reduction in our commitment to a strong military and the America's military continues to be the strongest on earth. In fact, some of the ways the military has served the country in situations that were not warlike such as hurricane relief etc. has reinforced that the military as an institution is a necessary and honorable part of our society.

Moreover, the way wars since Vietnam have been conducted have shown, in many cases, that an intelligent approach to conflict will result in the wise use of our military. The current problematic conflict tends to overshadow that since Vietnam, our presidents have used the military with skill and intelligence that

reflects the insistence of the baby boom generation that we don't just be the strongest military power, we also have to be the wisest. The way small conflicts like the Balkans and the first Gulf War were conducted reflect a new strategy that avoids the tragic mistakes of Vietnam and uses our military to win decisively and quickly.

Each new conflict gives the baby boomer generation and indeed all generations before and after the chance to redefine what military superiority really means. And whatever political viewpoint we might have, it can be said that if Vietnam caused the baby boomer generation to become more reflective and call upon political leadership to show accountability and responsibility in the use of our military might, that is a good outcome of what otherwise was a very bad war.

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