

# The 'Vietnam Syndrome' and Bush's Abyssinian crusade

by Leo F. Scanlon

"By God," President George Bush declared on March 1, "we've kicked the Vietnam Syndrome once and for all." His exclamation, uttered at the conclusion of the war against Iraq, tells more about the causes of the conflict than all the U.N. resolutions and congressional debate combined. It hearkens back in spirit and content to the notions which drove Benito Mussolini's imperial adventures in Abyssinia, the "victory" which erased the memory of Italy's "Vietnam"—the disasters of World War I.

Even as the Gulf war was raging, the world was astounded at the audacity with which the Bush administration transformed the coalition's aims from "liberation of Kuwait" to the total destruction of the nation of Iraq. The administration bragged to the press that it had "moved the goalposts" during the war, in order to guarantee that there would be no basis for any negotiated peace with Iraq, and no possibility for surrender either. This conniving is now celebrated as brilliant diplomacy, just as the slaughter of Iraq is hailed as a military victory. The truth is, the destruction of a beaten army retreating out of Kuwait, a symbol of the triumph of power over any other principle, has more than a passing resemblance to the Italian fascist massacre of Ethiopia.

The "Vietnam Syndrome" is not just ordinary Bush-speak phraseology. Washington syndicated columnists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak reported in a February article that "fear of a peace deal at the Bush White House had less to do with oil, Israel, and Iraqi expansionism than with the bitter legacy of a lost war. 'This is the chance to get rid of the Vietnam Syndrome,' one senior aide told us. 'We can show that we are capable of winning a war.'" The columnists explained that "this desire is intense among youthful administration aides. . . . But even older officials from the start have viewed the cost in lost American lives and hatred by the Arab 'street' as worth the renewed credibility of a country willing and able to use its military prowess."

William Bennett (whose performance as "drug czar" in the Bush administration qualifies him as someone who knows something about losing a war) explicated the matter for the *Washington Post* in a recent interview: "There is a recognition—explicit and not just tacit—by the United Nations that the United States is the nation that makes the moral difference

and the military difference."

For those who are still trying to determine what this means, George Bush spelled it out in his usual crude terms during a speech to families of servicemen at Fort Stewart, Georgia in February. "When we win—and we will," he promised the cheering crowd, "we will have taught a dangerous dictator—and any tyrant tempted to follow in his footsteps—that the U.S. has a new credibility, and that *what we say goes* . . . in this new world order that we seek to create. *And we mean it*, and he will understand that when the day is done."

A *Washington Post* staff writer spoke for the rest of the government, when he wrote: "You might have marched around the White House with a candle in your hands to protest the Vietnam War in 1968 yet still feel the proverbial lump in your throat watching Schwarzkopf come this close to wrapping the whole war up. . . . Not just terribly impressed, but terribly grateful to have something to be impressed about."

Republican Party propagandists put the matter much more pragmatically, substituting threats of trade war for the more prosaic euphoria of the *Post*. "America's handling of the crisis in the Gulf and America's leadership . . . will have a positive effect on American business around the world," according to William Ward, a former White House aide in the Nixon and Ford administrations. "Now we have the will to say, 'Hey, we are going to fight to become even more competitive economically.' I'm optimistic we can do that."

Norman Robertson, chief economist at Mellon Bank in Pittsburgh, adds that "the world has seen what U.S. high-tech military goods can do. . . . What we did in Iraq can hardly be viewed as incompetent or inept. That's got to get a few foreign consumers thinking about buying U.S. goods." And in case the Japanese Foreign Ministry hadn't gotten the message, the widely read cartoon newspaper *USA Today* opined that "the riveting video images of U.S. missiles threading their way down the airshafts and into hangar doors will do a lot to restore the 'Made in the USA' label."

## Italy and Abyssinia

The comparison between the Bush administration and the government of Mussolini's Italy is unavoidable once one accepts the fact that Bush is not kidding when he talks of a

“new world order.” There are only two basic types of world orderings, one based on just relations between sovereign nation states, and the other—epitomized by imperial Rome—based on the primacy of power. Mussolini understood, and openly emulated the Roman imperial model. His fascism, less encumbered by the cultish excesses of the Nazi movement, offers an object lesson in the folly of all imperial systems, ancient and modern.

Mussolini drew a parallel between the modern state and the Roman Empire when he told an admirer that the masses need “songs and formulas, anniversary commemorations, and the like. . . . It was just the same in ancient Rome.” He and his co-thinkers wished to make the symbols and heraldry peculiar and appropriate to military institutions into artifacts of popular culture, and thereby cement public support for the militarized institutions of the fascist state, and all its policies.

Bush has a different approach to the same goal, and one must believe him when he says that the war against Iraq was fought to show “that what we say goes.”

Consider his fixation with the defeat in Vietnam, as he ascribes to Operation Desert Storm a virtually mythic component. “In the war just ended, there were clearcut objectives, timetables and, above all, an overriding imperative to achieve results. We must bring that same sense of self-discipline, that same sense of urgency, to the way we meet challenges here at home. . . . The brave men and women of Desert Storm accomplished more than even they may realize. They set out to confront an enemy abroad, and in the process, they transformed a nation at home. . . . Think about . . . all they taught us, about our values, about ourselves.” This epic he is describing has nothing to do with the crushing of a technologically inferior army—it exists in the mind of George Bush.

Mussolini, like Bush and his colleagues, well understood that in a world of martial values where “might makes right,” military humiliation is anathema. The humiliating collapse of the Italian Army in 1917, and the subsequent mobilization against “the defeatists,” haunted Mussolini just as the defeat in Vietnam festers in the minds of the American Establishment. Mussolini told Italy in 1918 that “without the war our nation’s valor would have been extinguished. Italy can no longer be portrayed in the apron of an innkeeper. . . . We are and we wish to be a nation of producers. . . . We who have survived, we who have come through claim the right to govern Italy.” And in the chaos which followed World War I, he soon did.

In 1923 a suspicious assassination of an Italian military delegation in Greece rocked Mussolini’s regime. His response epitomized the imperial approach to crisis. He issued an ultimatum which demanded: public apology by the Greek government; an inquiry into the event, to be completed within five days; capital punishment for the perpetrators; honors to be paid to the Italian flag by a squadron of the Greek fleet;

and an indemnity of 50 million lira, also to be paid within five days. The mixture of symbolism with arbitrariness and draconian retribution is identical to Bush’s treatment of the Iraqi regime, and flows from a similar imperial view of international law.

There are lawful parallels as well with Mussolini’s economic policies, which favored the cartelization of industrial production and the concentration of banking power in a minimum of institutions. The Bush administration is accomplishing a similar goal, through the promulgation of “environmental” standards which can be met only by the largest cartels, and with banking reforms which defend the largest commercial banks while strangling smaller institutions. Mussolini asked the critics of cartelization: “Could the state repeat the gesture of Pontius Pilate?” The Bush administration simply says that its friends are “too big to fail.”

### **The Ethiopian campaign**

In 1934, as war pressures built on the European continent, Mussolini determined that it was time that Italy “civilize Africa.” The mission was imposed on Italy because Il Duce could no longer “ignore the constant and continuous provocations on the part of Abyssinia.” In a memorandum, Mussolini warned that it was too late for diplomacy to solve the “problem” of Ethiopia. He justified the assumption by describing the power of the new Ethiopian Army, trained by European officers, and the sophistication of the Ethiopian government under the direction of Emperor Haile Selassie. For Italy, this meant it was necessary to “resolve the problem as soon as possible,” and that could be accomplished in only one way: “The destruction of the Abyssinian Armed Forces and the total conquest of Ethiopia.”

Mussolini noted (and Bush might readily agree) that “the more rapid our military action, the less will be the danger of diplomatic complications. No one in Europe will raise any difficulties for us if the conduct of military operations rapidly creates an accomplished fact.” The Italian Army and Air Force proceeded to do just that, by overwhelming the Abyssinians with air power, terror bombings, and superior military technology.

Bush tells the American people, “We’ve learned the hard lessons of history. The victory over Iraq was not waged as ‘a war to end all wars.’ Even the new world order cannot guarantee an era of perpetual peace.” Mussolini spoke more directly: “Fascism . . . believes neither in the possibility nor the utility of perpetual peace. It thus repudiates the doctrine of pacifism.” Bush is not attempting to imitate Mussolini or Caesar, but he is attempting to travel the same path.

### **Bush and the ‘Arditi’**

Mussolini came from, identified with, and glorified the “Arditi”—guerrilla forces whose exploits in World War I fascinated the Italians in much the manner that “Rambo” does the Americans today. At the end of the war, the demobi-

lized, unemployed Arditi became the “black shirts” who backed Mussolini’s rise, and clamored for glory in colonial wars.

Bush has his own version of the Arditi, but not primarily among the soldiers of the Special Forces, nor among those embittered veterans who were cannon fodder in Vietnam. Bush’s constituency is based in the secret services, among the corps of operatives who have roamed the globe overthrowing governments, and staging coups, usually in the name of the United Nations, and always in the service of “the National Interest.”

They are deeply embittered by their failure in Vietnam. Some, like former CIA director William Colby, persist in the notion that there was nothing fundamentally wrong with American adoption of French colonial policy in Vietnam, and insist that the war would have been “won” if only it had been prosecuted longer. But the issue in Vietnam was never the lack of the use of force (more bombs were dropped on North Vietnam than during all of World War II), but rather the objective to which that force was applied. The moral failure of American policy was to wage a colonial war, not to foster the American System policies of republicanism and economic development that would have *won the peace*.

### Mythmakers at work

Today, Colby et al. are the Establishment “spooks” who have patronized the filmmakers and writers, like Oliver Stone (*Platoon*) and other Hollywood oracles, who cultivate the popular mythologies about the Vietnam War.

Others, like Adm. U.S. Grant Sharp (ret.), who was in charge of the Pacific Command during much of the Vietnam War, live with the fact that they never resigned in protest over policies they profess to have hated. Sharp was asked by Cable News Network if he ever had wished for the kind of autonomy General Schwarzkopf has had.

“‘Did I wish it?’ said Sharp, with a derisive laugh. ‘If I had had the same sort of freedom that General Schwarzkopf has, the Vietnam War would have been over in about 1966. We would have defeated North Vietnam, saved hundreds of American lives and won the war.’”

Says the *Washington Post*, “This attitude, and this version of what the lesson of Vietnam is, will become increasingly popular in the wake of the Persian Gulf War, and the wake of the Persian Gulf War appears to be right around the corner. . . . It’s the great unspoken boast that one might as well speak: We did something right. We won one.”

So, George enjoys, for now, the accolades of the world, and an 87% popularity rating. Then again, so did Mussolini, for awhile. His example might show an enlightened American that the only thing worse than losing a colonial war is winning one.

And by the way, it was the British who manipulated Mussolini into his Abyssinian campaign, just as Margaret Thatcher did with George Bush.

## LaRouche: EIR story on de Courcy is true

This statement was issued by Lyndon LaRouche, a candidate for the 1992 presidential elections, on Feb. 10:

“I have been informed that my friends at *Executive Intelligence Review* in the United States have received a communication from persons representing themselves as solicitors for one Kenneth de Courcy, the current publisher of the occasional periodical entitled the *Special Office Brief*.

“Mr. de Courcy’s solicitors complain that *Executive Intelligence Review* has made representations concerning statements of, and activities by Mr. Kenneth de Courcy, which Mr. de Courcy denies and says to be without foundation.

“I should say in fact that I am privy to knowledge of most of these matters, and in each case, either Mr. de Courcy himself did convey the information reported—either in writing or orally—in each case that this representation has been confirmed. In other cases, these are matters of the historical literary record, notably, including Mr. de Courcy’s relationship to one George Blake, while both were fellow inmates in Wormwood Scrubs Prison in Britain. These are matters which are represented by Mr. de Courcy, by records concerning Mr. de Courcy on file with the Hoover Institution, and otherwise in a book published by Mr. Blake himself.

“In other words, all the information against which Mr. de Courcy complains of *EIR* having published, as to what *EIR* actually published in these matters, is, to my satisfaction, completely truthful, and it was important to *EIR*’s readers and a larger audience, that these facts be published and thus made more widely known.

“The burden of the matter is that Mr. de Courcy, as he professes and as documents show, was very close to the circles of the former King Edward VIII of the United Kingdom, and to the circles in Britain and France which authored the 1956 Anglo-Israeli-French war against Egypt, including Alec Douglas Lord Home.

“To the same point, but more up to date, Mr. de Courcy has been a person of well-defined views close to, or identical to those of the non-Jewish, British Israelite cult, which has advocated, since some time, a war in the Middle East.

“More to the point, Mr. de Courcy himself repeatedly represented, in connection with his offers to mediate in connection with the political frame-up trial against me in the United States, that a) he was in contact with those who were the authors of this political frame-up; b) that he thought he could intervene to ameliorate the legal difficulties thrown at