3. Rehabilitation of a warrior concept of manliness

Defeat in Vietnam implied a humiliating emasculation for many on the right. How would real Americans respond to being 'stabbed in the back''? *Soldier of Fortune (SOF)* magazine was founded by Special Forces veteran Robert K. Brown in the spring of 1975, just before the fall of Saigon. Its message "was explicit from the start: the independent warrior must step in to fill the dangerous void created by the American military void created by the American failure in Vietnam."[1]. It featured articles about mercenaries, special ops, and counter-insurgency, as well as numerous ads for weaponry, as well as free-lance mercenaries. By the mid-1980s, it had 35,00 subscribers and newsstand sales of another 150,000.

SOF was part of a larger movement to propagate the individual warrior as the archetype of the true American. As James W. Gibson has demonstrated, *SOF* inspired magazines like *Combat Handguns, American Survival Guide,* and *S.W.A.T.* Military weapon sales exploded with the introduction of Colt produced semi-automatic versions of the M-16, an Israeli Defense Industries remake of the famous Uzi submachine gun, and even versions of the Soviet AK-47. In 1989, the US Bureau of ATF estimated that 2-3 million military-style rifles had been purchased since the war. Elite combat shooting schools and hundreds of new indoor pistol-shooting ranges opened. The National Survival Game invented in 1981 eventually morphed into paintball; by 1987 it was played by more than 50,000 people around the country each weekend. At one park called Sat Cong village (literally "Kill Communists") in the Mojave Desert, players had the choice of playing fields: Vietnam, Cambodia, or Nicaragua. "The 1980s, then saw the emergence of a highly energized culture of war and warrior…The New War culture was not so much military as paramilitary…[and it] presented the warrior role as the ideal identity for all men."[2] A re-masculinization of men was the order of the day for the new warriors.

New War culture also represented a reaction to the growing feminist movement, as well as to the war. Viet Thanh Nguyen has noted the fear of the enemy personified in the Vietnamese woman as "the complete and threatening object of both rapacious desire and murderous fear, the embodiment of the whole mysterious, enticing, forbidding, and dangerous country of Vietnam." In New War articulations, Gibson points out, there is a complementary division between the "good, 'pure' sister and the bad, 'impure' temptress."[3] The only safe woman is a supportive, virginal, white sister; the warrior must, at any cost, avoid contamination from the sexualized, enemy woman.

Until the middle 1970s, the National Rifle Association (NRA) had mainly focused on sportsmen, hunters and target shooters, and downplayed gun control issues. In 1975, it began to focus more on politics and established its lobbying arm, the Institute for Legislative Action (NRA-ILA), with Harlon Carter, and later, Neal Knox, as director. After 1977, the organization expanded its membership by focusing heavily on political issues and forming coalitions with conservative politicians. The ILA successfully lobbied Congress to pass the Firearm Owners Protection Act (FOPA) of 1986 and worked to reduce the powers

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[1] James William Gibson, (1994) *Warrior Dreams: Paramilitary Culture in Post-Vietnam America* James William Gibson, Author Hill & Wang, p. 7.
[2] Ibid. pp. 7-9.
[3] Gibson, p. 60.

of the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). In 1991,staff lobbyist Wayne LaPierre became executive vice president and public spokesman for the NRA. The NRA's focus on the 2nd Amendment's right to bear arms as the ultimate protector of democracy and defense against government over-reach meshed neatly with the myth of the heroic warrior. The NRA has such enormous political clout that Congress has refused to pass serious gun control legislation, despite public support for some limits on gun purchasing. Trump's strong pro-NRA stance[4] and his reaction to the Orlando shootings carry on the heroic warrior tradition.[5]

These heroes were embodied not just in fictional heroes like Rambo and Tom Clancy's Jack Ryan, but also in maverick warriors like Oliver North. On the staff of the National Security Council and in illegal defiance of Congress's Boland Amendment and the ban on arms sales to Iran, North arranged and oversaw what came to be called the Iran/Contra scandal, which involved the selling of arms to Iran in exchange for the release of US hostages in Lebanon. Profits went for weapons to the US-supported contras seeking to overthrow the Sandinista-led government of Nicaragua. Despite denouncing any dealings with terrorists,[6] Reagan was forced to admit that in fact that is exactly what happened, while still disclaiming personal knowledge. North's operation was an improvised combination of government and private action, including support from John Singlaub's World Anti-Communist League, Tom Posey's Civilian Military Assistance, as well as numerous free-lancers. When testifying before Congress in televised hearings, he became something of a hero. During his one-week testimony, he received 150,000 telegrams of support and his defense fund eventually raised over $ 3 million. The country was split, but his supporters were much more fervent. An outlaw patriot could rouse intense support.

The wimp vs. manly warrior factor became a key trope in American politics. Bush I had to fight off his 'wimp' image. He defeated Michael Dukakis in 1988 by successfully portraying him as an even bigger wimp. Bush's son, W., bragged about acting from his gut and played the Texas cowboy even as he was a product of the Eastern elite and managed to avoid serving in Vietnam. His swaggering image helped him avoid responsibility for not taking pre-9/11 warnings seriously; and the Democrats spared him in the name of national unity in a crisis.

Barack Obama's cool, detached image plagued him even as he pursued wars in Afghanistan and Libya, captured Osama bin Laden, re-intervened in Iraq, and greatly expanded the use of drone warfare. If Obama conceded in any way that the US had ever played a problematic role in the world, or expressed sympathy for the victims of the bombing of Hiroshima, or stated the obvious in that Guantanamo had become a "rallying cry for our enemies", then the right was quick to slam him for going on an apology tour. For them, any acknowledgment of US shortcomings is experienced as deeply humiliating in a way that destroying Iraqi society is not (for which in any case, they place blame solely on Obama's policies).

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[4] https://www.nraila.org/articles/20160929/trump-the-official-nra-qa

[5] If some of those wonderful people had guns strapped …right to their waist or right to their ankle and this son of a bitch comes out and starts shooting, and one of the people in that room happened to have it and goes 'boom, boom,' you know what, that would have been a beautiful, beautiful sight," in http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2016/06/20/trump-clarifies-stance-on-guns-in-clubs-after-nra-pushback.html

[6] http://articles.latimes.com/1985-06-19/news/mn-9185_1_reagan-rulesterrorists

In the run up to the 2003 war against Iraq, a senior British official [an intimate of the Bush crew] dryly told *Newsweek* before the invasion, "Everyone wants to go to Baghdad. Real men want to go to Tehran." And then, presumably, to Damascus, Beirut, Khartoum, Sanaa, Pyongyang. Richard Perle, one of the most influential W advisers to the Pentagon, told an audience not long ago that, with a successful invasion of Iraq, "we could deliver a short message, a two-word message: 'You're next.' "[7]

The fantasy of 'shock and awe', of remaking the Middle East, that military power would substitute for political acuity; all these represented a willful disregard—or a form of overcompensation--for the experience of Vietnam. The dangerous notion of pre-emptive war promoted by W. signaled that the US is willing to disregard international opinion and risk again the opprobrium it earned during the war in Vietnam. Real men always want to up the military ante and to hell with the consequences. Ultimately, the only meaningful power is the demonstration of violence.

The image of the heroic warrior has carried more emotional weight than any reality. So whether Trump actually opposed the Iraq war or that he referred to his time in military school as his Vietnam, or his extreme touchiness about the slightest criticism matters little. He has perfected the outsider warrior image. Plus he shares the disdain for, and fear of, strong women typical of the post Vietnam warrior.

[7] http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2003/04/21/war-without-end