

Running Head: CULTURAL FAILURES OF THE UNITED STATES

Cultural Failures of The United States

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## Outline

Topic #3: Using examples discussed in H100, compare and contrast two examples of military force succeeding or failing in its efforts to achieve cultural understanding as it conducted military operations.

1. Thesis Statement. During the Philippine and Vietnam Wars, the United States failed to achieve cultural awareness which resulted in resistance from local populace. This lack of cultural understanding resulted in prolonged wars and resulted in the loss of many lives.

2. Major Points.

a. The U.S. entered the Philippines under the guise to provide help during Spanish War, then decided to take the Philippines which met with resistance from Filipino revolutionaries.

b. The U.S. entered the Vietnam War to free South Vietnam from communism and starting major decision without knowledge nor understanding of the Vietnamese.

c. In both instances, the U.S. failure to learn and understand cultural cost them the support in local people.

3. Supporting Points of Evidence.

a. Policies of Attraction and Chastisement in Action, developed to garner support from the Filipino people, however, the policy did not consider the Filipino way of life.

b. The U.S. entered the Vietnam War as the "Great Saviors" of democracy; however, they wanted to apply American principles.

### Abstract

The United States (U.S.) Military entered into war campaigns under the guise of making improvements for local populace, only to result in bitter battles that lead to lost many lives due to a lack of cultural understanding. The U.S. engaged in extreme military tactics, which only ostracized local people. This paper will analyze the U.S. cultural failures in the Philippines Insurrection and the Vietnam War, by examining the similarities, differences, and root causes. Even though, these conflicts had lasting implications on the U.S. military and benefits of understanding another country's culture. The military gained powerful insights from past cultural failures that will make them more successful today and in the future operations.

## Cultural Failures of the United States

In almost every war, campaign, or conflict that the United States (U.S.) Military entered they were over confident and underestimated power of the opposition. This is especially true when it comes to understanding the cultures of opposition forces. The Philippine and Vietnam Wars are two examples where the U.S. was over confident and lacked cultural awareness which lead to U.S. failure to implement policy changes and lost many Soldiers lives. The U.S. entered the Philippines and Vietnam to assist two struggling countries from tyranny rule of Spain and China respectively. The U.S. wanted to help both the both countries establish democratic governments without altering local laws and customs. This paper will compare and contrast the two conflicts by providing specific examples of military cultural failures as well as examining the root causes of cultural failures. In addition, the insights gained from understanding a countries' cultural will allow Soldiers in the military to benefit Soldiers today and in the future. Cultural understanding will eliminate the cost of war, which is the loss of life.

### Compare and Contrast

The U.S. involvement in the Philippine War was over fifty years before the Vietnam War; but both wars suffered the same fate. The U.S. attempted over take these countries by size and force of the military however the U.S. failed to understand that these countries would not willing lay down their way of life and convert to American belief system. Both the Philippines and Vietnam have strong traditions and customs, which anchors their way of life. This was beginning of lack of cultural understanding for the U.S. The similarities between the Philippines and Vietnam starts with both countries have geographical terrain such as dense vegetation and rice paddies. These cultural similarities influenced the way the Philippines and Vietnam respond

to the U.S. occupation. However, the Philippine Insurrection differs from the Vietnam through motives of people involvement in the campaigns.

### *Philippine Insurrection*

The conflict between the U.S. and Philippines was set in motion some twenty years prior, when the U.S. set out to conquer the Pacific and the Caribbean. In 1878, the U.S. obtains permission to develop Samoa from Great Britain (Stewart, 2004, p. 341) only propelled the U.S. determination to control the Pacific. Initially, the U.S. and the Filipinos both wanted to free the Philippines from Spanish control. After the U.S. successfully took over control of the islands of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Guam from Spain in 1898, Spain had little option but to sell the Philippines to the U.S. for 20 million dollars. This left the U.S. in a precarious situation of governing millions of people and transforming them into civilized society was a huge undertaking. However, the delay of support from U.S., led the Filipinos to think that the U.S. wanted to keep the Philippines as a U.S. territory. According to Birtle, "President William McKinley believed the U.S. had a duty to liberate and guided them toward prosperous self-governing society" (2004, p. 100). Unlike South Vietnam, the U.S. was the ruling authority in the Philippines and was able to make, change and enforce laws, as they deemed appropriate to advance democracy.

The Army received new guidance from the President and enacted "General Order 100 of 1863" to occupy and transform the Philippines into the new U.S. territory. The Army did not anticipate encountering resistance from the Filipinos. The Filipinos had a band of rebels called Moros, who hated all white men due to the Spanish attempt to convert them from Islam. The Moros had a combination of personal gain and Allah's will as motivation to rebellion. The U.S. needed to gain control over the situation, General Elwell Otis' Policies of Attraction and

Chastisement, which rewarded acceptable behavior and punished unacceptable behavior. The policy worked temporarily because to the Moros personal gain however, the policy eventually failed because the threats of death to civilian Filipinos who assisted the Army. This compares to the Viet Cong's ability use fear to garner support for the local population.

### *Vietnam War*

In 1954, Vietnam gained their independence from French rule. The war with France left the country economically and political bankrupt. In Vietnam's attempt to provide, stability to the country Ho Chi Minh, who followed Lenin's communist believes, emerges. Minh is the leader of Viet Minh, which controls North Vietnam under communist rule. "The Viet Minh agreed to divide the country in two zones at the 17<sup>th</sup> Parallel" (Stewart, 2004, p. 286), with hopes this would end the growing hostile. This leaves South Vietnam in chaos trying to establish an anti-communist state. Ngo Dinh Diem gains control of the South Vietnam, however the country lacks experience in government and the citizen are starving. The U.S. supports Diem in his challenge against communism. Just like in the Philippines, the U.S. meant well in the support of South Vietnam to help set up a democratic government and eliminate communist opposition. In the beginning the U.S. stated, "Vietnam would require patience, however the U.S. truly believed a few months of intensive bombing would destroy the small band of renegade guerrillas from North Vietnam" (State of Mind, 2007, par 4). This is classic example of the U.S. underestimating the determination of the enemy. The Vietnam War lasted over twenty years and cost thousands of U.S. and Vietnam Soldiers lives. However, unlike in the Philippines, the U.S. did attempt to learn the language in order to foster better relationships with the Vietnamese people.

### Root Causes of Cultural Failures

There were numerous reasons for the U.S.'s cultural collapse in the Philippines. The first mistake was that the U.S. ignored the fact the Philippines, who had just won the independence from Spain, wanted to be self-governing state. This led to a lack of trust by the Filipino people and they were unwilling to assist the U.S. in capturing rebel forces. In addition, the Moros thought the Army was weak due to the policies established by the "Taft Administration wanted to bring civilization to the Moros while avoiding warfare them" (War and Empire, p.167). In the attempt to educate and refine, the U.S. sought to instill Christianity in the Philippines. The U.S. disregarded the local religions of the Moros, who practiced Islam.

In the Vietnam War, the U.S. made slight improvements such as learning to speak Vietnamese still did not lead to cultural success. Even though many Americans learned the language, they did not understand "the basic intellectual grammar that lay beneath" (State of Mind, para 7). The language barriers aside, Vietnamese people believed the U.S. would preserve their way of life. Conversely, the U.S. gave little thought to preserving the Vietnamese cultural through relocating the South Vietnamese into hamlets. The initial purpose of the hamlets was to make easier to protect the people, but implementation of the hamlets failed two fronts. First, the U.S. did not consider the importance of tradition and leaving a family legacy for Vietnamese when moving the people into the hamlets. Many of Vietnamese refused to leave because they did not want to abandon the land of their ancestors and children. This frustrated the Army that caused them to build too many hamlets, which lead to the second failure of the hamlets. The Army was not able to adequate protect the people living in the hamlets from the Viet Cong. In order to avoid the Viet Cong terrorism the local starting providing information to the Viet Cong this sacrificed the Army's strategic advantages.

### Benefits of Achieving Understanding

There are many benefits of achieving cultural awareness. In understands a country cultural then the other country knows what is important to that country. This awareness makes communications and negotiations more effective. Whereas, in the Philippine and Vietnam Wars, if the U.S. had a grasp cultural understanding perhaps the wars would have ended earlier and many lives saved. A country can gain respect and support from a potential hostile country when one invests the time in learning another country's cultural. This can foster positive political and economic outcomes for both countries.

### Insights Gained

The cultural failures by U.S. in the Philippines and Vietnam, aided the U.S. in better preparing for the future. Leaders must prepare for aspects of the battle they will face to include understanding and appreciating another country's cultural. In the current operation tempo, the U.S. military is located from Afghanistan to Iraq with multinational forces in support of the Global War on Terrorism; the U.S. cannot afford costly cultural misunderstanding. Cultural awareness is imperative to U.S. success in these regions.

### Conclusion

The U.S. military on countless occasions failed to achieve cultural understanding of the local populace. This paper analyzed the Philippines and Vietnam to serve as examples of catastrophic effects of cultural failures. In comparing the two conflicts, even though years apart, the U.S., did not apply lessons learned in the Philippines in their approach to conquering Vietnam. History has proven understanding the root causes of cultural failures can only benefit the force. The U.S. must use insights gained from failures and cannot continue to underestimate the determination of an opposition based on size of the force.

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