

Argumentative Essay

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Abstract

The United States has been involved in many counterinsurgency operations throughout its history. This paper will concentrate on three counterinsurgent critical factors: the role of the government and occupying forces, public opinion, and time. To succeed in our current Global War on Terrorism strategic goals, we must look at past counterinsurgency operations and see how these factors aided the military forces and political agencies involved. The counterinsurgency operations used for historical reference in this paper are The Philippine Insurrection and Woodrow Wilson's Intervention in Mexico.

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The United States has been involved in counterinsurgency operations throughout its history. There are three critical factors to counterinsurgent operations: the role of the government and occupying forces, public opinion, and time. To succeed in the strategic goals of our current Global War on Terror, we must look at past counterinsurgency operations and see how these factors affected the military forces and political agencies involved. The counterinsurgency operations used for historical reference are The Philippine Insurrection and Woodrow Wilson's Intervention in Mexico. Many people believe that counterinsurgent operations only fuel insurgent ideologies and that counterinsurgent operations do not work. Counterinsurgent operations do work when planned with the three critical factors in mind. What most people fail to understand is that the counterinsurgent force differs from a conventional force; it has to go out among the populace to begin civil projects, staff security stations with the local security forces, and be prepared to fight insurgents.

The first critical factor is the role of the government and occupying forces. The government and occupying forces must understand the will of the people, show restraint during combat operations, and deny sanctuary for the insurgent. Most importantly, the government in power must present a credible prospect for the future.

“An insurgency is an armed rebellion against a constituted authority when those taking part are not recognized as belligerent.” (Wikipedia) “Counterinsurgency is a military term for the combat against an insurgency, by forces aligned with the recognized government of the territory in which the armed conflict takes place.” (Wikipedia) Insurgent and counterinsurgent forces can wage two different types of aggressions: confrontation or conflict. A confrontation's purpose is to impose will upon another,

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influence or establish conditions. The government or combatants can accomplish this with a show of force, posturing or employment of force. However, the intent is winning a clash of wills. This method, the Indirect Approach, continues the attack on armed elements of the insurgency as well as attacking the support of the people for the insurgents. This often includes diplomatic or political agencies alongside (or in charge) of the military. A conflict's "purpose is to destroy, take, hold: to forcibly attain a decisive outcome by the direct application of military force." (Duyvesteyn,) This method, the Direct Approach, aims at destroying the enemy. Generally, the military is in the lead, and other agencies may have a supporting role.

The United States used both approaches during the Philippine Insurrection. The decentralized army units realized they had to alter or abandon official policies of benevolence or non-military pacification. The small army units developed and implemented their own counterinsurgency policies. The success of these policies and methods expanded army control throughout the region. In certain areas, the army conducted small, intensive campaigns to rid the regions of the guerilla forces. The army also attempted to win over the population through civil projects, such as building roads and schools. Eventually, the army reduced the guerilla influence through active military operations and local support. The counterinsurgency in the Philippines succeeded because the army used both approaches to defeat the insurgent forces.

During counterinsurgency operations, the government must deny sanctuary to the guerilla forces and show restraint when dealing with insurgent forces. Counterinsurgents must control the area to deny space to rest and refit. Additionally, overmatching the insurgent force will play into the guerilla's tactics of deeds of propaganda and strategy of

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provocation. Instead, achieving tactical advantage through superior intelligence and information operations will gain support from the public. The government in power must present a credible prospect for the future. It takes an idea to defeat an idea, and the government must offer a better, more credible idea than the ideologically driven revolutionary alternative.

The U.S. government demonstrated to the Mexican public that it could restrain the army and utilize the public after the massacre at Santa Ysabel, Mexico. A group of armed men, associated with Pancho Villa, killed seventeen American miners. There was a great uproar in the American government to intervene in the struggle between the Mexican de facto government and Pancho Villa. President Woodrow Wilson decided against sending armed troops to Mexico. Instead, with help from the Mexican government, posted reward flyers for the criminals involved. The flyers were effective and the local security forces detained several members of the armed group.

The second counterinsurgency critical factor is public opinion. The counterinsurgent force cannot put The People into one category. The People vary from region to region; have different opinions, perspectives, cultures, and values. However, people do usually place needs in two different categories: freedom to prosper and freedom from hunger, fear, hatred, cold, and uncertainty. People will follow the leader who best alleviates their current needs. The insurgent wants to create a situation where his leader is the one who can best satisfy The People's needs. At the same time, the insurgent portrays the government as the aggressor who The People should fear. A national movement may occur when the government or counterinsurgent force allows the insurgent to gain popularity over the existing internationally recognized government.

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In the early twentieth century, under Porfirio Diaz, the Mexican head of state, Mexico seemed to be progressing along the same paths as more advanced countries. However, the Mexican population was retrogressing under Diaz's regime. Communal properties began disappearing during Diaz's rule. Additionally, foreign investors began buying large swaths of land and setting up feudal principalities. "The country in reality belongs to outsiders – to people who have never seen it, or visit it only occasionally." (Clendenen, 10) Eventually, a growing national trend, leading to the public support of an insurgent named Pancho Villa, started in all social and economic classes.

The third critical factor is time. Time for the counterinsurgent force may not seem important, but it is critical for a successful campaign. The counterinsurgent force must have a plan prior to starting operations to minimize the time required to complete its military and civil operations. In the Philippines, the counterinsurgent force prevailed due to a short, well thought out operation. The army swiftly locked down their specific regions and began multiple operations to take back control of areas lost to insurgents. In addition, the short, three-year counterinsurgent operation allowed the public to realize that the counterinsurgent forces were just that, not an occupying force.

The counterinsurgent forces also provided a stable economy for the locals in their specific regions. The influx of money helped the counterinsurgent forces sway the public opinion in their favor. Fortunately, the counterinsurgent force did not stay in their regions long enough to hyper-inflate the local economy.

Many people throughout the world believe counterinsurgent forces further fuel insurgent ideologies. Harsh treatment of the insurgent force, the sole use of military operations, and insurgent sanctuaries are a few topics of discussion brought up by those

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opposing the idea of a counterinsurgent operation. The harsh treatment of insurgent forces is often confused with the strong, swift military operations following guerilla operations. Today's counterinsurgent forces know that they must not overmatch the strength of the insurgent force or overreact to a guerilla act. We can win tactical battles; however, the cost could be the loss of public or international support. Unfortunately, many media outlets only show the sole use of military operations against insurgent forces. The counterinsurgent force must continue to promote its civil operations. Some people also argue that a sanctuary will give the insurgent force a place to govern, making it easier for them to cease operations. These semi-autonomous states often prove to be nothing more than training grounds for future insurgent operations. In addition, many of these sanctuaries also provide protection from counterinsurgent operations.

To succeed in the Global War on Terror, we must look back to our past successes and failures in counterinsurgent operations. We must not forget the three critical factors: the role of the government and occupying forces, public opinion, and time. The United States' military and political agencies must understand the People we are helping and the insurgent force ideology. We must be prudent in our use of force and realize that overstaying our welcome can hinder how the international community views our country. Our knowledge of the insurgent force and continuing civil projects, combined with tactical successes, will allow us to achieve our strategic goals. However, we must not lose faith with the people we are trying to help. Doing so will greatly hamper our chance of success and will only prolong the Global War on Terror.

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