

Running Head: TOO HIGH A PRICE TO PAY FOR CULTURAL MISUNDERSTANDINGS

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Too High a Price to Pay for Cultural Misunderstandings

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Outline

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

1. Thesis Statement. The Philippine and Vietnam Wars are two examples of where the Army failed to achieve cultural understanding during military operations, which consequently resulted in countless deaths and tragedies.

2. Major Points.

a. The U.S. entered the Philippine War driven by self-interest and greed. Although they took over the country's authority, Filipino revolutionaries refused to recognize American authority over their country.

b. The U.S. took over the war from the South Vietnamese by making a majority of the decisions about the war and about internal Vietnamese policy.

c. The benefits of understanding a group's cultural background, such as language, religious traditions, social customs, and norms, far outweigh the tragedies of not understanding them.

3. Supporting Points of Evidence.

a. General Elwell Otis' Policies of Attraction and Chastisement, although formed with good intentions, revolved around American principles, not Filipino ones.

b. Several instances during the Vietnam War demonstrated American ignorance about the people of Vietnam, to include its military, and resulted in disaster.

Abstract

This paper examines the U.S. Army's failure to achieve cultural understanding during the Philippine Insurrection and the Vietnam War. The paper starts by comparing and contrasting the two conflicts. This process reveals that although there were differences between the two conflicts, the similarities prove tragic for the Army as well as the countries involved in the confrontations. The root causes or reasons for why the Army failed to reach cultural understanding during the two conflicts paint a gruesome picture. By analyzing this picture, the benefits of why the Army should strive to reach culture understanding, along with the insights gained from the investigation, are available for Soldiers so they can apply them as they prepare for current and new confrontations.

The cost of lacking cultural awareness is asserted rather than spelled out. In insights section makes a distinction between cultural "awareness" and cultural "understanding."

Some problems with citation mechanics.

Too High a Price to Pay for Cultural Misunderstandings

The United States (U.S.) military has taken part in all minor and major conflicts starting with the Revolutionary War and ending with the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

kind of obvious

Although the U.S. military has emerged victorious in a majority of conflicts, they have failed miserably in other areas, such as reaching cultural understanding of the foreign soil they occupy. The Philippine and Vietnam Wars are two examples of where the Army failed to achieve cultural understanding during military operations, which consequently resulted in countless deaths and tragedies. This paper will discuss some of the root causes that led to the failure; however, to understand the root causes, comparing and contrasting the two campaigns, as well as exposing specific examples of why everyone paid a high price for cultural misunderstandings, is necessary. In addition, discussion of the benefits of understanding a group's cultural background will lead to insights gained from this analysis.

Compare and Contrast

The Vietnam War occurred almost 6 decades after the Philippine Insurrection; however, both were plagued with issues from the start. The U.S. Army and the countries involved suffered adversities and demise during the campaigns for several reasons, those that include egotism, greed, lack of concern, and cultural misunderstandings. Although both wars are similar in nature, such as events during the war and the outcome, it is important to distinguish that there are some variations between the two wars.

Philippine Insurrection

Unlike South Vietnam, the Philippines belonged to the U.S. at the outbreak of the war. In April 1898, Spain occupied Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines. According to Birtle (2004), the nation's attention was fascinated with the process of carving out new empires rather

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than policing old ones. In addition, U.S. President William McKinley was interested in military and political possibilities in the Philippines and sought to “exploit a temporary windfall and to act on future developments” (Linn, 1989, p. 1). President McKinley issued Spain an ultimatum that required them to surrender their authority and government to the U.S. This challenge resulted in a declaration of war and eight months later, the U.S. declared victory over Spain. In The Treaty of Paris, Spain surrendered Guam and Puerto Rico, gave up its claim to Cuba, and sold the Philippines to the U.S.

Unlike the citizens of South Vietnam, most Filipino people initially saw their connection with the U.S. as that of two nations joined in a common struggle. During U.S. intervention with Spain, they provided the U.S. with valuable intelligence and military support hoping to help the endeavor. They believed that U.S. involvement with Spain was a good thing and that once liberated, they would be free to run their own country. In contrast to the Vietnam War, the U.S. had full intentions to occupy and remain in the Philippines. This goal would ultimately result in a Filipino revolution and disaster.

Vietnam War

In contrast to the Philippines, the U.S. had no jurisdiction over South Vietnam when they became involved in the conflict. In 1954 “On July 20 France and the Viet Minh agreed to end hostilities and to divide Vietnam temporarily into two zones at the 17th Parallel” (Stewart, 2005, p. 286). North and South Vietnam emerged because of the break. The Viet Minh established a Communist government in the North while Ngo Dinh Diem attempted to establish an anti-Communist state in the South. In the interim, the U.S. led the forming of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, which according to Stewart (2005) signaled their commitment to contain Communist invasion in the region. Although already involved with tensions in Vietnam, years

later the U.S. became involved on a larger scale for several reasons. In comparison to the Philippine Insurrection where the U.S. became involved mainly because of military and political possibilities, the U.S. entered the Vietnam War to prevent Communism from spreading.

In contrast to the early days with the Filipino people, the U.S. failed to develop the loyalty and support of the Vietnamese people for several reasons. First, the people of South Vietnam were Buddhists and the U.S. supported Diem, a Roman Catholic who consolidated power and was oppressive over time. Second, the U.S. took over the war from the South Vietnamese by making a majority of the decisions about the war and about internal Vietnamese policy. In addition, the South Vietnamese people recognized that U.S. troops considered them uneducated, dirty, and strange.

Root Causes

There were many reasons why the Army failed to achieve cultural understanding in the Philippines. The first mistake that they made was assuming “that the U.S. should accept control of the Philippines to educate and Christianize the natives – overlooking the fact that the overwhelming majority of the islands’ population was Roman Catholic” (Wars and battles, 2007, para 5). In addition, President McKinley believed that the Filipino people deserved liberation from the Spaniards and required the U.S. to guide them toward Western civilization (Birtle, 2004). The primary reason for the Army’s failure was General Elwell Otis’ Policies of Attraction and Chastisement. Otis formed the policies to ^{reward} compensate desired behavior and punish those who would not comply. Otis formed the policies with good intentions; however, they revolved around American principles and not that of the Filipino community.

According to Birtle (2004), Otis’ basic formula for dealing with the Filipinos was to keep diligent faith with the people and teach them to trust the U.S. Otis believed that the only way to

gain the trust of the Filipino people and pacify them was to respect them, as well as their society, treat them fairly, help their economy, and provide basic government services for them. Over time, however, the Army's pacification programs placed serious burdens on units and their Soldiers, as well as the people of the Philippines. Soldiers began to resent the people and vice versa. Soldiers never quite gained an understanding of what Filipinos had endured in the past nor did they seek understanding of their customs, intellect, or faith. There were many instances where Filipino people were harassed or murdered.

Birtle (2004) states that the policy of chastisement dealt with Filipino revolutionaries that refused to acknowledge American authority over the islands. This policy hurt both the revolutionaries and the innocent civilians of the Philippines because in some instances, Soldiers could not tell the difference between the two. "Some officers adopted a policy of burning homes and villages in retaliation for Filipino ambushes during the first days of the war" (Birtle, 2004, p. 126) regardless of the affiliation of the village. The Soldiers also destroyed innocent people's crops, livestock, and other property.

Just as there were many reasons for the Army's failure in achieving culture awareness during the Philippine Insurrection, the same was the case during the Vietnam War. Initially, the U.S. became involved in Vietnam because of Communism. The U.S. believed that "Communists scorned democracy, violated human rights, pursued military aggression, and created closed state economies that barely traded with capitalist countries" (Rotter, 1999, p. 2). Although the people of South Vietnam agreed with the same belief, the U.S. never took the time to poll the people to discover what their convictions were or what type of government they desired. Army leaders on the ground assumed that South Vietnamese people were ignorant, uneducated, and would be

grateful to have them around, when the truth was that people of South Vietnam wanted their own “peace, independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity” (Young, 1991, p. 153).

Another reason for the failure was that neither Army leaders nor their subordinates took the time to examine why the people of South Vietnam were the way they were or did the things they did. They assumed that they were defenseless, strange, and stubborn people.

“Rice cultivation – labor-intensive, backbreaking, closer to gardening than any farming even soldiers from farm country had ever seen – simply did not register with the troops, for whom neither the labor, nor the crop, nor the people who planted and depended on it were real” (Young, 1991, p. 175).

Young (1991) describes that on countless occasions, Soldiers would drive their tanks through the rice paddies without regard to the people and their means of sustenance.

Whether intentional or not, Soldiers would occasionally destroy burial sites, which the natives considered of significant importance since they worshiped their ancestors there. Similar to the people of South Vietnam, Soldiers either did not recognize or became numb to whether an occupant was from the north or south. The most tragic of events occurred when Soldiers blatantly destroyed innocent villages, to include the occupants.

Benefits of Achieving Cultural Understanding

There are many benefits of achieving cultural understanding. One benefit is that understanding someone else’s culture leads to cooperation and compromise. One is more willing to cooperate and compromise if the other displays understanding and compassion. Strategically, mutual mission accomplishment as well as establishing and maintaining stable, friendly relationships are benefits. Keeping the civilian population, as well as Soldiers, safe and sound is

another fundamental benefit. In addition, achieving cultural understanding facilitates economic, environmental, and political issues.

Insights Gained

After analyzing insights gained from this paper, it is evident that Army leaders, as well as their Soldiers, must prepare themselves for the challenges that the U.S. military faces today. Although cultural awareness is important, a deeper level of cultural understanding is necessary. Soldiers must become cultural experts by studying many aspects. They must have knowledge of the country's history as well as the dominant culture. Soldiers should be aware of customs, norms, and values, along with religious beliefs and language. In addition, Army leaders need to uncover what the citizens of an occupied country desire instead of assuming they know what they want.

Conclusion

The U.S. military has paid a high price in the countless conflicts they have participated in for failing to achieve culture understanding. Two cases in particular, are the Philippine and Vietnam Wars. Although there are differences between the two conflicts, similarities illustrate tragedy in both cases. The benefits of achieving cultural understanding outweigh the risks; therefore, the only way to accomplish this is by revealing examples of the root causes that led to their failure, analyzing them, and documenting the insights gained for future use.

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