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Compare and Contrast Two Past Counterinsurgency Campaigns:

The Vietnam War and the Philippines Insurrection

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16 October 2008

Abstract

It is imperative to the success of today's counterinsurgency operations that we thoroughly examine and learn from our past successes and failures. By closely comparing and contrasting past counterinsurgency campaigns our military and civilian leaders can avoid past errors and use successes in the future planning of counterinsurgency operations and the global war on terrorism. The Vietnam War and the Philippine Insurrection are two past insurgency campaigns that can still teach us valuable lessons today.

Compare and Contrast Two Past Counterinsurgency Campaigns

The Philippine Insurrection

In 1898, during the Spanish-American War, the United States provided military support to the Filipinos as they struggled to free themselves from Spanish colonialism. The Filipinos were able to fight hard and push the Spaniards into Manila. Shortly after the confinement of the Spaniards in Manila American warships landed just on the outskirts of the city where the U.S. accepted the surrender of the Spaniards and then occupied Manila. Upon Spain's defeat, under the Treaty of Paris, the U.S. paid Spain \$20 million to take possession of the Philippines which denied the Filipinos their independence.

The U.S. President during that time, President McKinley, had formally announced under his 'Benevolent Assimilation Proclamation' that the Philippines would be recognized as an American colony. This caused hostilities to break out between the U.S. and the Filipinos in 1899 which led up to the Philippine Insurrection which was better known as the Philippine-American War (1899-1902). This war would be an awakening to American conventional forces and a hard lesson learned to senior military leaders.

Philippine abandonment of the conventional approach. The Filipinos refused to acknowledge any American authority over the islands and wanted to proclaim their own government. Under the leadership of Emilio Aguinaldo, the Philippine army initially tried to fight conventionally against the Americans which failed and forced himself and his men to flee into the mountains of Luzon. Aguinaldo, rather than accept defeat, abandoned the conventional way of fighting and started using guerilla warfare. This same concept would also be adopted in the Vietnam War and still remains a chosen enemy tactic in our current global war on terrorism today.

U.S. conversion to small unit tactics. The American senior military leaders assessed that the Philippine war would be over in less than a year but the insurgency would keep the U.S. military off balance and force the senior leadership to re-evaluate their tactics. The insurgents hit and run tactics, which included raids, ambushes and surprise attacks, was taking a serious toll on the American forces. Gen. Theodore Schwan realized that a change in tactics was necessary when fighting against an unconventional foe. The decision was made to disperse his forces with the intent of protecting the population,

maintaining a presence in troubled areas, and provide the basis for prompt, offensive action.

Small unit tactics and decentralized operations worked much more effectively against the insurgency than conventional means. A technique that would also be attempted in the Vietnam war as well. The Philippine war was a war that would last over three years and cost the United States \$400 million and over seven thousand casualties. Birtle (1998)

The Vietnam War

The Vietnam War, also known as the second Indochina War, occurred in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia from 1959 to April 30th of 1975. The United States government decided to enter the war to try and prevent a communist takeover of southern Vietnam. The U.S. involvement escalated around the early 1960s and the government began deploying combat units to Vietnam in the beginning of 1965. Wikipedia (n.d.)

Once again the U.S. was about to get involved in another conflict where a determined enemy would choose the use of guerilla warfare against the Americans conventional forces. Propaganda and the media would play a profound role in how the war was supported on both sides.

Failure of the U.S. to gain local support. Just as in the Philippine War, the U.S. did not have support of the Vietnamese people either which fueled the insurgency allowing them to be more effective than our military ever expected. Incidents of brutality and indiscriminant killings of civilians were extremely counterproductive in the U.S.'s attempts of winning over local support. Examples such as using the toxic "Agent Orange" to clear forests or the massacre of more than 500 civilians in the hamlet of My Lai on 16 March 1968. VietnamWar.com (n.d.). Collateral damage and devastation to hundreds of locals in the crossfire of the U.S. forces and the insurgents increased the anti-American sediment in the local populous. This also was used as propaganda against the U.S. which brought more local civilians to support the insurgency.

Unfavorable public opinion; effects on the war. As the U.S. casualties continued to grow and reports of atrocities were being published back in the states public support for the war began to take a serious hit. The way the soldiers were viewed by much of the U.S. public at the time was negative and was taking its toll on the Soldier's morale. Anti-war protests and the growing decline in public support also fueled the insurgencies

propaganda campaign countering any positive work the U.S. had done.

Military Operations Today

Fighting counterinsurgency on several fronts. Insurgency / guerilla warfare has been proven over time to be a very effective and deadly tactic used against a conventional force. Today, with the threat of terrorism globally, our military must adapt faster than ever before. Whether in Iraq or Afghanistan to protecting our homeland, the global war on terrorism has no borders and our military and civilian agencies must work together on all fronts to prevent the spread of terrorism and to keep our homeland safe.

Relating past campaigns to current operations. The Vietnam War and Philippine Insurrection have a myriad of similarities to our current conflicts. We've seen the effects of collateral damage, negative propaganda, alienating the local populous, lack of cultural understanding, and innocent civilians getting caught in the crossfire. When one looks at each conflict you can't help but notice how the concept of guerilla warfare has not changed that much over the years and still remains effective. The lessons learned has been an enormous turning point in the way our military fights. The U.S. military has developed and

continues to develop new counterinsurgency tactics techniques and procedures that has truly changed and re-shaped the way our military is formed, thinks and operates.

In conclusion, the effectiveness of our military and our government depends on our leaders carefully examining the successes and failures of past campaigns. By understanding where we went wrong or right in the past will save time, assets and lives. Leadership that clearly understands the importance of this will make a positive impact and help us to succeed in our military's current and future counterinsurgency operations and lessen our chance of failure in fighting the global war on terrorism.

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