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Counterinsurgency Campaigns

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## ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY

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### UNITED STATES ARMY SERGEANTS MAJOR ACADEMY

Compare and contrast two counterinsurgency campaigns covered in H100 and analyze the root causes of success or failure in each conflict. Your analysis will identify three critical factors that led to success or failure on the battlefield as well as the overall importance of tactical success in achieving strategic goals. In conclusion, synthesize the insight gained from your analysis that soldiers can apply to the Global War on Terrorism.

Thesis Statement

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**Abstract**

This paper aimed to explore on the similarities and differences of the Philippine War (1899 – 1902) with the American Western Frontier (1865 – 1890). It analyzed the root causes of the success or the failure of the two historical events to be able to identify critical factors that led to such success or failure on the battlefield. The study also attempted to find out the overall impact or importance of tactical success in achieving strategic goals. In general, the paper aimed at coming up with a synthesis that would point to the important insights that may serve as guides to those who dare go on war against tyranny and terrorism.

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## COUNTERINSURGENCY CAMPAIGNS

### *Introduction*

Counterinsurgency is just one of the many forms of conflict a soldier has to brave. Andrews (2002) in his thesis in the US Military states that it is counterinsurgency that can be considered as one of the most difficult forms of conflict an army can face.

In such thesis, he accounted the Philippines Experience in counterinsurgency. As the Americans were unprepared for such conflict, it was difficult for them to win the war but the Americans eventually developed an effective strategy.

“After defeating Spanish forces in Manila during the Spanish-American War, a well-developed insurrection, led by Emilio Aguinaldo, challenged the United States Army for nearly four years. Although the army in 1898 was unprepared for a large-scale, two-front war, it conducted an extremely effective counterinsurgency campaign 7000 miles from home in inhospitable terrain (Andrews, 2002)”.

The American Western Frontier also brought a lot of pain in the hearts of Americans but it brought several lessons in the history of the Americans.

Chapter 14 of “Winning the West: The Army in the Indian Wars, 1865-1890” states:

“The besieged red man, with white civilization pressing in and a main source of livelihood—the buffalo—threatened with extinction, was faced with a fundamental choice: surrender or fight. Many chose to fight, and over the course of some twenty-five years the struggle ranged over the plains, mountains, and

deserts of the American West, a guerrilla war characterized by skirmishes, pursuits, massacres, raids, expeditions, battles, and campaigns, of varying size and intensity. Given its central role in dealing with the Indian, the Army made a major contribution to continental consolidation.”

This paper then aims to compare the counter-insurgency campaigns of the American Western Frontier (1865-1890) with that of the Philippine War (1899-1902) and to gather insights, which could serve as guiding principles for those who again would wage war in the name of international peace.

***The Counter-insurgency Campaigns of the American Western Frontier  
And the Philippine War (1899 – 1902): A Comparison***

Thorough research points to the reality that the insurgency in the Philippines was not easy to resolve. The American soldiers have to cope up with the Filipinos who felt victorious of their struggle against the rapacity of the Spanish colonizers. They needed to study the people, the culture, the terrain, and the language of the people.

With strong determination and patience, combining education and militarization, the American soldiers found effective strategies to win the battle. Cassidy (2004) describes the American victory:

“The American military won a relatively bloodless but unambiguous victory in three and a half years in a way that established the basis for a future friendship between Americans and Filipinos.”

The Philippine War with the Americans was indeed short. The people, after 300 years of fighting for freedom and independence from the claws of the Spanish colonizers, seemed to be

more willing to accept new leaders that would emancipate them from their economic deprivation and political bondage. Joes (2000) explains that it was indeed a war of less resistance:

“There were no screaming jets accidentally bombing helpless villages, no B-52s, no napalm, no artillery barrages, no collateral damage. Instead, the Americans conducted a decentralized war of small mobile units armed mainly with rifles and aided by native Filipinos, hunting guerrillas who were increasingly isolated both by the indifference or hostility of much of the population and by the concentration of scattered peasant groups into larger settlements.”

The experience of the American soldiers in the American Western Frontier is similar to the experience of the soldiers who fought in the Philippine War. These groups of soldiers have one particular goal, to win over the communists who were gaining strength. The soldiers are of the two different groups of different time but were united to end communism and tyranny. The American Western Frontier was confronted with Insurgent Indians who wanted to take over the nation. The Philippine War, fought by the Americans to regain Philippines from the hands of those who wanted total independence of the nation from the hands of the Spanish colonizers and then of course from their “neo-colonizers: -- the United States of America.

What the Americans have experienced and suffered during the American Western Frontier was learning lessons, and that provided them the edge in the Philippine war. If it took them long years to fight in the Western Frontier, it took them a very short time to win over the Philippine War.

***Factors/Root Causes of the Success or Failure in Battlefields***

In a History Book published by [www.history.army](http://www.history.army), it states that the U.S Army nine principles of war that are also incorporated in different manners in the military doctrine. The proper conduct of such principles matters most in the military operation. Such principles are: (1) objective, (2) offensive, (3) maneuver, (4) mass, (5) economy of force, (6) unity of command, (7) security, (8) surprise, and (9) simplicity.

It is important for every military operation to have a well-defined, decisive, and attainable objective. In a war, the ultimate objective is the complete destruction of the enemy's forces and their will to fight. However, then it is also important to include regime change, political, economic, and social reshaping. In order to be victorious and to win the battle, the military must not only defend his territory but must have the strong will and determination to conduct offensive operations to seize, retain, and exploit. The military should be able to put the enemy at a disadvantageous position. It should be able to maneuver the enemy and such requires so much flexibility in organization, administrative support, and especially, command and control. It must have a number of men or mass concentrated enough to have powerful combatants at a decisive place and time. It should be able to allocate minimum essential combat power to secondary effort. Those in command must be able to exercise judgment and carefully use the exact amount of necessary force in the primary and secondary operations to attacks to ensure sufficient combat power at that right place in time.

The following line is extracted from Chapter 14 of the book, *Winning the West: The Army in the Indian Wars, 1865-1890*, explaining some causes of failure.

“The practice of uprooting in the Indians from their homeland was also the cause of the Nez Perce War in 1877. The Nez Perces had been friendly to the whites from the days of their contact with Lewis and Clark. Although they ceded some of their lands to the whites, they refused to give up the Wallowa Valley in northeastern Oregon. White encroachment increased, stiffening the lines of political pressure back to Washington and leading inevitably to decisions favourable to white settlement and removal of the Nez Perces to the Lapwai Reservation across the Snake River in Idaho. Some elements of the tribe complied, but Chief Joseph and his people did not and the Army was ordered to move them. An inevitable course of events and irresponsible actions by both reds and whites made hostilities unavoidable.”

The United States Military struggled to win the war in the Philippines. It was General Elwell S. Otis who realized that a military solution alone would not end the insurgency in the Philippines. Cassidy (2004) says:

“The United States did not wish to appear like invaders or conquerors. They wanted to play a friendly role with their new acquisitions.”

President McKinley then promised for the protection of the homes, offered jobs, and granted personal and religious rights of people. But then the United States claimed supremacy over the island and all the officials of the lands were forcibly made to swear allegiance to the U.S.

Otis tried to drive a wedge between the Filipino people and the guerrilla in an attempt to employ the benevolent assimilation of McKinley. He was not at all successful because the

insurgents countered the strategy by resorting to sowing fear. The guerrillas resorted to terrorizing the natives to insure continued support from the people.

The American soldiers realized that the policy of attraction was a failure. It was urgent then for them to develop and implement a strategy that would eventually isolate the guerrillas from the mass base. This was to insure that the guerrillas would be deprived of their supplies and support. It was easier then to defeat them in the battles.

The strategy caused the failure and the collapse of the insurrection in many areas of the Philippines. As Cassidy said:

“In the final stages of the conflict, the army adopted more repressive measures, which stiffened resistance. Only when the Americans employed the policies of conciliation and repression in the correct proportion were they able to end the insurrection.

Cassidy also (2004) explains that Americans saw success during the Philippine War of 1899 to 1902. This was because the American soldiers learned to work having the following in their hearts and their minds: (1) they avoided big-unit search and destroy missions as they found out that those actions were counter productive; (2) they have learned to maximize the employment of indigenous scouts and paramilitary forces to increase and sustain decentralized patrolling; (3) they mobilized popular support by focusing on the improvements of schools, hospitals, and infrastructures; and (4) they worked to enhance regime legitimacy by allowing insurgents and former insurgents to organize anti-regime political parties.

*Insights that can be applied to the Global War on Terrorism*

Based on the experiences of both wars, the researcher realized that it is important to put in to the hearts and minds of the military forces that not only offensive operation would make them win battles. The military must be able to use policies and doctrines that would bring the support of their mass-based isolating their enemies in the process. They must learn how to combine policies of attraction and chastisement. As Altieri, et al. (2007) said in his article, the American Western Frontier was a war that contained one of the most successful counterinsurgency campaigns in the United States' history. How its military interventions, civic action, and pacification operations and tactics fit into the operations offer additional insight into current and future counterinsurgency campaigns.

“It is important to realize that sound counterinsurgency theory, combined with a decent understanding of the conflict at hand, is essential for applying practices from learned lessons to a current or future campaign; what works in one counterinsurgency campaign can easily fail when directly applied to another.”

The lessons learned from the counterinsurgency campaigns in the Philippines in 1898-1902 are also worthwhile. One must have had to realize that since the inception of the war, the military had already fought numerous unconventional enemies and had conducted several large-scale pacification operations. The experiences and lessons learned in civil wars gave the US military an edge over the irregular armies and that they realized that military actions alone would not solve the insurgency problems so they came up with a political solution by implementing the policy of attraction which is the benevolent assimilation introduced by President McKinley.

### *Conclusion*

The three-pronged strategy of the US military were most effective design (1) winning the support of the native or local inhabitant, (2) isolating the insurgents from the populace, and (3) defeating the guerrillas in the battlefield.

On the other hand, if the counterinsurgency campaigns failed, it must be due to the following reasons: (1) focusing on conventional military operation and civic actions; (2) lack of promptness in reacting to change to guerrilla warfare; (3) failure to devise an all-encompassing strategy to defeat the insurrection.

What Taber enshrined in his War of the Flea are worth remembering:

“Fighting the elusive guerrilla show that with the right mindset and with some knowledge of the methods, the war of the flea is in fact winnable.”

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