

Counterinsurgency: Winning Hearts and Minds

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Abstract

Counterinsurgency in the 21st century does not expose itself in the form of yesterdays conventional battles, nor do past-conflicts provide us with guaranteed future results. The ability to gather intelligence ultimately depends on one's skill to win the trust and support of the local populous. As opposed to the limited media of the past, today's communication influences several audiences: existing and potential allies, undecided and decided population, overt and covert forces. Leaders at all levels must have the patience, cultural respect and ability to interact with people. In order to win current wars and future conflicts, we must understand the political culture and possess the innovative and adaptive military leadership required to achieve the end result – winning hearts and minds.

The United States has engaged in several counterinsurgency campaigns throughout our history; some considered successful, while others are viewed as failures. The strategic goals supporting such campaigns play a vital role in the overall tactical success or failure on the battlefield. One critical factor to weigh in any operation is public support, which requires a specific approach in order to achieve the end result; securing the support of the national population. We succeeded in the Philippines because we established effective relationships with the local people; we failed in Vietnam because we neglected to realize the importance of developing those same, crucial relationships.

Few realize that the prelude to U.S. Admiral George Dewey's 1898 Naval victory over the Spanish fleet, was 29 year old Emilio Aguinaldo's leading the Filipino insurrection against Spanish rule between 1896 and 1898. With the exception of (the Capitol) Manila, this self-proclaimed president led his forces to eradicate the Spanish from the rest of the Philippines. Aguinaldo's army had the capitol surrounded, but Manila was not seized until Major General (MG) Wesley Merritt's U.S. Army forces arrived. Unknown to Aguinaldo, Spain's General Fermin Jaudenes requested to secretly surrender Manila to General Merritt; the Americans took over Manila on August 13, 1898. "The Spanish government ceded the Philippines to the United States in the 1898 Treaty of Paris" (Philippine-American War, 3). With optimism that America would push for Philippines sovereignty, the *illustardo* from the Tagalog ethnic group (Aguinaldo) declared Philippines independence, which was never recognized by Spain or the United States. Determined to annex the islands, U.S. President (William) McKinley felt that an increase in the number of garrisons throughout the archipelago would improve the army's ability to protect the Filipinos; McKinley also felt that the people were incapable of governing themselves. Aguinaldo's Filipino insurgents would have none of this, so they unsuccessfully attacked the American forces in Manila during 1899. "The failure of this and subsequent

conventional battles with the Americans caused the rebel leader to disband the field army and commence guerilla operations in November 1899” (Deady, Spring 2005, p.55).

Aguinaldo escaped to northern Luzon. During 1900, the Philippine population totaled 6.8 million throughout its 74 provinces, of which 3.7 million resided in Luzon. Deady explains that Luzon’s military operations were the most extensive in the insurrection (2005). Insurgent forces were predicted to be between 80,000 and 100,000 strong; meanwhile, American forces were 40,000 strong at the start of the conflict and grew to over 74,000 by 1902.

With U.S. strategy still unclear, President McKinley instructed MG Merritt to establish security and order on the islands under United States control; ultimately, the preferred objective was to create an unwavering, democratic, self-governing ally to the United States. Shifting from conventional to Guerilla warfare did not have the impact on the American forces the Filipinos thought it would. While there were a number of Americans engaging in dreadful acts of violence, General Arthur McArthur (replaced Major General Elwell Otis during May 1900) “continued the commitment to a pacification policy relying upon good works of the military government to bring an end to the war by convincing Filipinos that an American colonial government would have a sincere interest in their welfare and could be trusted” (Gates, 2008, p. 7). By eliminating local resistance, the Americans were able to prevail and the provinces remained peaceful. This strategy applied diplomatic, educational, military and economical elements of power throughout the Philippines resulting in the local populous embracing the American approach, while isolating the guerilla movement. This effort, combined with the impact of general order 100 and the lucrative idea of employing Filipinos into local government, effectively targeted both the insurgents’ strategic and operational centers of gravity.

With the assistance of 81 *Macabebe* scouts, the Americans disguised themselves as prisoners, overwhelming and capturing Aguinaldo and his supporters within the confines of their

own encampment during March 1901. Three weeks after being taken into custody, Aguinaldo directed his followers to give up their weapons. As the Filipino revolutionaries disbanded, the majority of the Filipinos were convinced that their personal cooperation with the Americans would assure their safety. A few months later, the Philippine Organic Act was endorsed.

The Philippine Organic Act of July 1902 approved, ratified, and confirmed McKinley's Executive Order establishing the Philippine Commission and stipulated that a legislature would be established composed of a lower house, the Philippine Assembly, which would be popularly elected, and an upper house consisting of the Philippine Commission.

(Wikipedia, 2009, p. 9)

This undertaking also granted Filipinos nearly all of the protections provided by the U.S. constitution. Additionally, U.S. Army commanders at all levels had the approval authority to establish civil governance, to include the creation of town boards and mayors, resulting in regional pacification. As the Filipinos partaking in government grew, so did their self-governing. America's ability to successfully employ military, cultural and security measures throughout the Philippines was key to defeating the insurgent's strategic and operational centers of gravity. Pillars of this success were the United States' purchase of land from the Vatican, the lack of modern-era telecommunications and the weapons collection policy. The U.S. land acquisition and resale was significant, offering benefits to the local populous the insurgents could not contest. The weapons collection policy (rewarding pesos for weapons) coupled with the successful pacification policies resulted in the accumulation of hundreds of weapons from disbanding insurgents. In the end, it was the American's dedication, patience and cultural understanding that won the respect of the civilian population resulting in a successful counterinsurgency campaign.

Fifty-two years later, the Vietnam conflict was another story. "US involvement in Vietnam began during the administration of Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953-1961), which sent the US

military to South Vietnam” (Vietnam War, p.1). During 1957, the communist rebels (Viet Cong), supported by North Vietnam, started an aggressive movement to overthrow the anti-communist government in South Vietnam. “When the North Vietnamese reignited the insurgency in South Vietnam in 1959-1960, the South Vietnamese armed forces (the army, the civil guard and self-defense corps) were not organized or prepared to ensure population security while taking on the newly labeled Vietcong” (Phillips, 2008, p. 3). Before his death, President Kennedy decided to obligate 4,000 American troops into South Vietnam, which peaked to 536,100 under President Lyndon B. Johnson. Unlike the Philippine conflict, the U.S. did not respect the Vietnamese’ cultural requirements. “There was little understanding that the war could be fought more effectively by protecting and winning over the population, and little appreciation, particularly at the top, of its political and psychological aspects” (Phillips, 2008, p. 4).

Simply put, the North Vietnamese understood the nature of the local and political culture of the South and used this to their advantage, while the United States was over reliant on air support and indiscriminate with artillery interdiction, resulting in the alienation of both the South Vietnamese and American public; additionally, the media played a huge role in bringing the war to the home-front. In order to be successful during future counterinsurgency campaigns, leaders and Soldiers alike must envision a realistic doctrine consisting of cultural understanding, while providing protection and security to the civilian population during combat operations. Applying these ingredients will win the hearts and minds of those most affected, ensuring success in the Global War on Terrorism.

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