

Running Head: OPERATION DESERT STORM AND VIETNAM

Compare and Contrast of Counterinsurgency Between

Operation Desert Storm and Vietnam

MSG Corey J. Watson Sr.

United States Sergeants Major Academy

SGM Perdue

R02

Compare and Contrast of Counterinsurgency between Operation Desert Storm and Vietnam

“An insurgency is organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through use of subversion and armed conflict”. (Department of the Army, 2004, p.1)

This alternative to the constituted government being overthrown is called a counter state, and these organized movements in simpler terms are basically uprisings. Uprisings against indigenous regimes are called rebellions and uprisings against an external occupying power have is called a resistance movement. Once these movements become armed, then it is an insurgency. And naturally, all these are always political in nature.

As for its origins and causes, insurgencies are brought about by various reasons ranging from more equality in the distribution of resources to a demand to end the foreign colonial rule in a certain country. It all begins when citizens start to perceive something lacking in political economic or social opportunities. And when their complaints get exploited, it becomes a political issue. After that, public support is mobilized. Then opposition groups are formed. The government would start working to resolve the issues and if they are resolved, then good; peace will remain. However if the government is unable to do so, demands are made on the government and the only way for these demands to be met, is through insurgency.

Now with that definition of insurgency in mind, counterinsurgency is basically the government’s way of fighting back. A counterinsurgency is considered successful when the effort to form a counter state is stopped and the state of insurgency is neutralized.

Counter-insurgency operations include [psychological warfare](#) and [information warfare](#). These are actions such as the direct interference in a country's [politics](#), the use [media](#) to spread [disinformation](#), basically public deception, which are done to maintain control of the people.

Some historical events that can be used to present the applications of Western Counterinsurgency tactics would be on two wars that the USA participated in; Operation Desert Storm and the Vietnam War.

Operation Desert Storm, it started when Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990. Before that, Saddam Hussein had been accusing Kuwait for of oil overproduction and theft from the Rumailia Oil Field. That attack caught many by surprise, including those who expected it to happen particularly due to its extent. They did not just seize the oil fields in Kuwait, as some people assumed they would do, but even continued to invade the downtown Kuwait city, and, not showing any signs of stopping anytime soon, were still marching toward the Saudi Arabian Border.

America became involved in this when King Fahd of Saudi Arabia met with and convinced US Secretary of Defense Cheney and General Schwarzkopf to assist them in defending the country against Hussein. They were trying to see if the Iraqi troops would stop once they get to the border. But due to the discouraging result of their analysis. As soon as their meeting ended, the necessary orders were issued; American forces were on their way to Saudi Arabia.

Saudi then was already well defended and is safely away from the Iraqi threat. The American focused their attention to removing Hussein's control over Kuwait. Getting Kuwait back was not an easy task. A direct offensive attack would be insufficient so they called for backup in the form of additional 140,000 troops (initially there were 200,000), including the 3rd Armored Division. Troops from other countries such as Britain, France, Egypt and Syria also started arriving. The United Nations has also approved the use of force if Iraq would still not withdraw their hold of Kuwait by January 15 1991.

January 16, Iraq still has not backed down; Operation Desert Storm was officially in action. US forces systematically destroyed key Iraqi structures starting from the Iraqi border radar stations; then the Iraqi anti-aircraft network; and finally other key structures in downtown Iraq such as the Presidential palace, communication centers and power stations with air strikes that went on day and night.

Iraq retaliated by firing seven Scud missiles at Israel. America however convinced Jerusalem not to retaliate to that attack with the promise to upgrade Israeli Patriot Missile systems to better intercept more Scud missiles and to focus the American air attacks on Iraqi Scud missile sites.

The Allied Ground attacks lasted for four days. The first day (February 24, 1991) was focused first at Kuwait City, the second to the west aimed at the Iraqi flanks, and the final further west, beyond the major Iraqi defensive lines. These were easily accomplished and the allied marines' advance was easy.

On the second day, the marines continued their advances and were able to cut off the Iraqi troops' ability to withdraw.

Day three, considered as the largest tank battle in history, was the day when Kuwait was finally liberated. Iraqi soldiers had started retreating from the tank battle. They stood no chance against allied machinery. However, their retreat was halted by allied aircrafts. The Iraqis were made to retreat on foot as their vehicles were destroyed.

Day four, the war was practically over. All that's left for the allied Soldiers to do is to destroy any remaining Iraqi armaments so the latter would have no more means to retaliate further.

The Vietnam War, unlike operation desert storm, which went on smoothly for the Americans, was a battle that the Americans lost. It was from 1965 to April 30, 1975. It was a battle between [Democratic Republic of Vietnam](#) (North Vietnam) which was represented by the communist Vietnamese guerrilla movement called the National Liberation Front (NLF), and the [Republic of Vietnam](#) (South Vietnam) which comprised of military forces from the United States, the Republic of Vietnam, Australia, New Zealand, and South Korea. It was also the longest military conflict in U.S. history.

The NLF together with the north Vietnamese were pushing for a counter state. South Vietnam had adapted a democratic government mainly due to the fact that they were a colony of France. The north wanted the whole country to be unified under a Communist rule. That was basically what they fought for. North Vietnam wanted to form a counter state; a communist state.

Vietnam was first divided into north and south during the first Indochina war or French Indochina war. It was the French's battle to maintain colonial rule in Indochina against [Ho Chi Minh's \(Communist Party leader \) independent movement](#).

The eventual withdrawal of the US troops in Vietnam was due to a peace negotiation called The Paris Peace Accord, which was signed on January 27, 1973. That agreement however did not last long because the North eventually invaded the south in what was to be known as the Fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975. The city of Saigon was eventually renamed Ho Chi Minh City in honor of North Vietnam's former president. Vietnam was finally united under communism in July 2, 1976 and was then called the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

The two wars had very different outcomes. The former started and was ended in victory quickly while the other lasted for years and was a failure.

Why was operation desert storm such a success and the Vietnam War a failure? The proponents of the Counterinsurgency tactics of Operation Desert storm may have already learned from the American's defeat in the Vietnam War.

The Vietnamese were able to use their terrain to their great advantage. They also had the so-called Cu Chi tunnel system, which greatly aided them in battle. The Americans were simply not prepared for that, and the Jungle terrain made it even worse for them. Because of that the marines who were part of operation desert storm may have been oriented, trained and prepared better for the territory in which they will be fighting.

It also seems that the allied forces on desert storm had a great technological advantage against the Iraqis. Their air attacks caused great devastation to many Iraqi forces and facilities, which made the ground war easier for the marines. It seems that air power was their greatest weapon in that war. It was in desert storm when the power of air attacks was proven.

What added more to the efficiency of those air attacks was the strategy on how it was utilized. Attacks were done systematically, destruction structures that are of great relevance to the enemy. The first target of the Allied air attack was the Iraqi border radar station. This would have blinded the Iraqi forces rendering them unable to monitor the allied activity around their border. Now unable to see what is coming towards them, the Iraqis were unable to defend and utilize their anti-aircraft network against allied bombing runs. Now they are completely defenseless against the allied planes. The next targets were the presidential palace, communication centers, and power stations; a strike to the heart of Iraq. It was like for example in a man-to-man battle, your opponent was struck first at the eyes, rendering him unable to see and defend against your following attacks. Then you attack his arms and legs, therefore crippling him making him unable to fight back. Next would be to attack the throat, choking him, making

him unable to call for help. Then finally to finish, attacking the heart or the head; striking where it hurts the most.

As for the Vietnam War, the main advantage of the guerrilla's in this battle was their terrain. They had a mastery of it. Americans could not stop the movement of supplies and troops along the Ho Chi Minh trail no matter how much they try to bomb their enemies. This was probably due to the guerrilla's underground tunneling system. The Americans were unable to know and prepare for the environment they fought in.

The Americans also failed to truly know their enemy. They did not realize how disciplined and cooperative the Vietnamese were. The Vietnamese were underestimated. During that time, every Vietnamese was a participant of the war, even the civilians. There is a Vietnamese quote saying, "If a truck is stuck, tear down the walls of your house". It simply means that every north Vietnamese citizen was willing to aid the guerrillas in the war, even to "tear down the walls of their house" so as to allow the passage of a military truck.

Lastly, the morale of the American Soldiers were not very high. They've been fighting for so long that somehow they've become tired of it. They also did not have much support from their people anymore. At first, support for the war was high, but as it went on for too long, the people opted more for peace talks and negotiations. The soldiers were not motivated to fight. They just wanted it to be over.

What we can now learn from those two examples for the global war on terror, to sum up the strengths and mistakes of the American troops, the most important is to know your enemy and their territory. It is important to know where and how to hit where it would Hurt the most. Other than that, technological superiority is really an advantage in today's modern age, and knowing how to use it systematically is a must, for it will just be useless otherwise. Also keep

your soldiers happy and motivated. Knowing that they are being supported and appreciated will push them to go further.

References

Dillon, K. V., Goldstein, D. M. 1999. *The Vietnam War: The Story and Photographs*. [Brassey's](#).

_____. Published 1999

Headquarters, Department of the Army. (2004, April 1). *Counterinsurgency Operations*.

Retrieved January 10, 2008. from <http://www.us.army.mil>