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United States Army Transformation

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Outline

Topic #2: Compare and contrast two efforts by the U.S. military to transform. Your analysis will identify two or three key factors that led to the perceived or actual need to transform, two or three key policies enacted to effect the desired transformation, the leading forces that shaped policies pursued in order to achieve the transformation, and an assessment as to how well the military organization under investigation achieved its desired end state. In your conclusion synthesize the insights gained from your study that Soldiers can apply as they prepare for the challenges that lie ahead.

1. Thesis Statement. Throughout the existence of the United States military, the ability to transform to meet the ever-changing requirements of the battlefield has been accomplished by the agility and adaptiveness of leaders at all levels. The ability to see the need for such transformations, during peacetime and war, is a contributing factor to our overall successes throughout the years.

2. Major Points

- a. Incorrectly perceived threat led to poor transformation in the early stages of WW II.
- b. Failure to transform tactics and doctrine policies doomed the tank destroyer concept.
- c. The inability of U.S. forces in the Philippine War to win the hearts and minds of the Filipino people prompted army leaders to resort to brutality to win the conflict.

3. Supporting Points of Evidence

- a. Transformation to the Tank Destroyer concept to defeat the German armor threat.
- b. New technological advancement but no supporting doctrine changes.
- c. Transformation from “The Policy of Attraction” to “The Policy of Chastisement” to end the Philippine War.

Abstract

Throughout the existence of the United States military, the ability to transform to meet the ever changing requirements of the battlefield is a testimony to the agility and adaptiveness of leaders at all levels. While, at times, transformation moved slowly in its early stages, the desired effect often resulted. During World War II and the Philippine War the U.S. army transformed its' forces to meet the challenges of the enemy it faced. In the pages that follow, a comparison of these transformations shows that change is not always easy or effective at first, especially if the perceived need for transformation is initially incorrect.

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Introduction

Throughout the existence of the United States military, the ability to transform to meet the ever changing requirements of the battlefield is a testimony to the agility and adaptiveness of leaders at all levels. The ability to see the need for such transformations, during peacetime and war, is a contributing factor to our overall successes throughout the years. Two examples of the need for transformation in the United States military occurred during the beginning of World War II and during the Philippine War. While the lessons learned by the American leadership during both of these periods of transformation were critical to the development of our future war fighting and nation building policies, getting to the root of the problem was difficult for the leadership in place. Because of this, transformation was slow to come about and in the case of the Philippines, arguably unsuccessful.

When one looks at both attempts at transformation, one sees vast contrasts between both attempts. The need for transformation and the policies or doctrine that helped dictate the transformation process, and the ultimate result of the transformation are just two of the differences. The one overwhelming similarity to both attempts at change is that the political and military leadership did not have a thorough grasp of the underlying problems that created the need for change.

Need for Transformation and Policies

Without transformation, a once superior military can find itself as an inferior opponent. By not being proactive and embracing change, leaders cannot expect current doctrine and tactics to be successful against an evolving enemy. At the end of the first World War, the United States did little to make advances in technology or improve doctrine and policies on how we fought the

enemy. Meanwhile, while the United States relished in their World War I victory, the German military was hard at work transforming into a lethal fighting force by improving their technology and tactics. After the Germans defeat of the French in World War II, with what seemed to be the use of new and improved tanks, the U.S. finally realized the need for transformation. The U.S. military leaders perceived the need for change as technological in nature. The Germans had superior tanks and they were seen as the most threatening weapon on the battlefield. Therefore, if the Allies could stop the German tanks, they could defeat the German army. To accomplish this, the U.S. made technological transformations to create a better, more mobile anti-tank weapon system. To exploit this new weapon system, the army began to establish new doctrine and tactics. Entire anti-tank units, the “Tank Destroyers”, found themselves consolidated at the Corps and higher level (Gabel, 1985). By doing this, senior officers could direct these anti-tank weapons anywhere on the battlefield to defeat the German tank formations. Once attacked, by the consolidated tank destroyers, only the German infantry would remain for the Allied infantry to fight.

While the need for transformation during World War II was technological in nature, the need for transformation during the Philippine War rested on the ability to win the hearts and minds of the local people. By doing this, the U.S. forces hoped to crush the guerilla resistance and begin nation building operations in the Philippines. To break the spirit of the Philippine guerillas the senior leadership of the U.S. forces adopted “The Policy of Attraction.” The premise behind this policy was to, “win the confidence, respect, and admiration of the inhabitants of the Philippines” (Stewart, 2005). The army began to build schools and roads, refurbish market places, and began to clean up villages and towns in an effort to show the Filipino people how life could be once the insurrection ended (Birtle, 2004). They hoped to gain

the trust of the locals and sway public opinion in their favor. Once the insurgents saw that they had lost the support of the local people, the U.S. believed they would lose the will to fight. While the efforts of the American soldiers did sway some public opinion, it was not enough to impact the insurrection. The Filipino insurgents began to execute any locals who helped American soldiers or provided any intelligence information to American forces. With the threat of being killed and losing any land they might have to the insurgents, the local people refused to help the Americans. As a result, the U.S. leadership transformed to a “Policy of Chastisement” (Birtle, 2004). This policy suggested that anyone who was thought to be plotting against U.S. forces, helping insurgents, or withholding critical information from U.S. forces would meet with harsh punishments (Birtle, 2004). If the local people would not respond to a “helping hand” from the Americans, then more harsh measures were capable of occurring. Punishments included imprisonment, relocation to a different area, the burning of homes and crops, and even execution in some cases. By cracking down on those who were in any way helping the insurgents, the American forces hoped to make life so rough for the people and the insurgents that the war would end. While this constituted a drastic shift in policy, U.S. forces felt it critical to now punish those who were against them while still trying to protect those local people who helped them.

Ultimate Results of Transformation

The transformation to the tank destroyer concept was flawed from its’ conception. The leadership of the army perceived the need for transformation as mainly technological. In fact, the major problem with dealing with the German army was tactics and doctrine. The German army fought as a combined arms army. Artillery supported the infantry and armor while these units mutually supported each other. Using the tactics of mutual fire support, speed and

overwhelming fire power, the German divisions quickly defeated their enemies. The U.S. army failed to identify the combined arms threat. They simply saw massive tank formations as the perceived threat. Therefore, transformation focused on developing a vehicle and weapon system powerful enough to defeat the enemy tanks. While this was a necessity, initial U.S. doctrine never transformed to effectively use the tank destroyer units against the German army or win in a combined arms fight. The tank destroyer units were specifically built to engage tanks at a decisive point in a battle. They were not to engage infantry, artillery, or any other unit on the battlefield (Gabel, 1985). As a result, German infantry, moving with armor support, often engaged the tank destroyers inflicting massive casualties and leaving the German tanks freedom of movement. In the early years of World War II, the inability of the U.S. army senior leaders to transform tactics and doctrine to meet the combined arms fight of the Germans resulted in an initial failure of transformation to the tank destroyer concept.

As time past and junior leaders became more experienced, transformations occurred at lower levels to utilize the tank destroyer units in an effective manner against the combined arms fight of the Germans. Tank destroyers found themselves tasked down to brigades, battalions, and companies where they performed indirect fire missions, breaching missions, and supported friendly infantry units (Gabel, 2004). Once the Americans learned how to fight as a combined arms force, the advantages of the German army diminished. While the outcome of U.S. transformation was successful, the initial reasoning and application of that transformation failed to correctly perceive the true threat on the battlefield.

The ultimate result of transformation during the Philippine War was also a success. However, it came at a large price. While the “Policy of Attraction” appealed to some, it failed to defeat the insurgents. The army leadership felt compelled to adopt the “Policy of Chastisement”

when acts of kindness and lenience failed to win the trust and support of all the Filipino people. Under this new policy some leaders and soldiers crossed the line of acceptable harshness, not only to sympathizers of the insurgents, but to innocent people as well. Torture, executions, and the burning of villages and land became commonly accepted as necessary tactics to bring the war to an end. While this policy was successful in doing this, it demonstrated to soldiers and leaders that brutality and disregard for human rights was acceptable during war if it meant winning. The policy of chastisement created an environment where the Filipino people feared, resented, and hated American forces. Yes, we won the war, but at the price of many of our values and integrity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the need for transformation always exists because the enemy is always changing. These transformations are sometimes subtle, but can be crucial to the outcome of a conflict. The army, during World War II and the Philippine uprising, transformed to meet the challenges of their battlefield. Whether those transformations were ultimately successful or not is still a subject of debate today. In today's army transformation surrounds us daily. We are reorganizing our forces, adapting to an evolving enemy in Iraq and Afghanistan, and using the relatively new concept of "winning the hearts and minds of the people." Historically, Soldiers do not embrace change well. We are comfortable with what we know. However, change is going to happen and we cannot stop it. However, if we learn nothing else from the examples given in the previous pages, we must learn this: when we do execute transformation we must have a clear understanding of why we need to transform, how it affects our forces and the population around us, and the ability to execute the transformation while maintaining our morals and integrity. We will not win the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan because we our superior in

military strength. We will succeed by transforming from a constant attitude of “killers of the terrorists”, to the “protectors of the people.”

References

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