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Running Head: COMPARISON OF IRAQ AND VIETNAM

Argumentative Essay

Comparison of Iraq and Vietnam Conflict

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17 March 2008

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Unclassified

**Outline:**

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 insights gained from your analysis that Soldiers can apply to the Global War on Terrorism.

**Thesis Statement:**

The United States Army dealt with counterinsurgency operations during the Vietnam War and is currently dealing with counterinsurgency during the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). Throughout history, the Army continues to improve and increase its chances on today's battlefield by applying critical information gained from lessons learned to make future operations successful. We can save many lives and increase our chances to fight and win the GWOT by applying lessons learned from prior conflicts such as the counterinsurgency operations in Vietnam.

- I. Comparison between Iraq and Vietnam Counterinsurgency operations
  - A. Costly
  - B. Similarities
  - C. Causes of the conflicts
  
- II. Techniques insurgents used in Iraq and Vietnam
  - A. Guerilla combat tactics
  - B. Armed propaganda
  - C. Violence

- III. Factors that contributed to failure in Iraq
  - A. Rumsfeld's doctrine
  - B. Small amount of troops
  - C. Failure to implement security measures
- IV. Factors that contributed to failure in Vietnam
  - A. The Vietnamese policy
  - B. Failure to empower Vietnamese
  - C. Troop withdrawal
- V. Factors that contributed to success in Iraq
  - A. The surge
  - B. The Iraqification plan
  - C. Elections

**Conclusion:**

Although the United States Military has proven repeatedly that, it can learn and adapt to any situation that our country may face. Due to lack of cultural awareness, the Army entered many conflicts with expectations that were not realistic. We can implement many valuable lessons from mistakes made in Vietnam into the Iraq conflict to save lives and billions of dollars. In many cases, we assumed that foreign countries have the same ideology that most Americans do. Through proper training and by applying the strategy used from prior conflicts, we will be able to better prepare our Soldiers to confront and defeat the enemy on the battlefield in direct combat operations.

## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to compare the counterinsurgency operations in Iraq to the Vietnam conflict. I will identify the root causes of success or failure in each conflict and demonstrate three critical factors that contributed to the success or failure on the battlefield. We have witnessed on many occasions, conflicts in which history seemed to have repeated itself. If we do not take time to learn from our successes as well as our mistakes, we will continue to suffer many losses on the battlefield. By reviewing tactics and techniques implemented in prior conflicts, we will save lives and billions of dollars. Planners must integrate lessons learned during the Vietnam conflict into initiatives to combat terrorism in Iraq.

### Iraq and Vietnam Conflict

The lesson learned by the United States during the Iraq and Vietnam conflict was costly. The Vietnam War left the United States military dismayed, confused and discouraged. Both wars cost billions not to mention the numerous lives lost and wounded. Nearly 1.5 million military people were killed in the Vietnam War. There were over 58,000 United States military personnel killed. Over 2000 missing and 305,000 wounded during the entire war. There was between two to five million civilians injured. The wounds of the Vietnam War struck the U. S. Army and the Marines the worst. It was a no win war for both sides. In Iraq, almost 25,000 military forces have been wounded and nearly 4000 military personnel have been killed. The U.S. learned that when it comes to interferences, America does not have much patience and time. We must implement time and patience when it comes to sustaining in prolonged wars. Although Americans like success, the sooner the mission is over, the better.

When it comes to comparing Iraq and Vietnam Wars there are many similarities in these counterinsurgency operations. Economic interest was the motivation for both wars. The American public opposed both wars. Both wars gained U.S. involvement under uncertain circumstances.

Vietnam is a country divided between the north and the south. The north was controlled by Ho Chi Minh, a communist ruler. Ngo Dinh Diem was the democratic leader in the south. The communist, Russia and China, funded the Republic of Vietnam and the National Front of Vietnam (Viet Cong). Their main purpose was to reunite both Vietnams under one rule. The Second Indochina War is another name for the Vietnam conflict. Many people also recognized it as the American War. In 1959, United States military forces became highly engaged in the Vietnam conflict and continued for the next sixteen years. The communist

captured Saigon in the spring of 1975.

In Iraq, Al-Qaeda's main goal was to evoke a civil war. In July 2006, sectarian aggression replaced terrorist strikes on American troops as the main intimidation to America's goal of a stabilized and free Iraq (Record, 2006). Just as in Vietnam, the terrorist disguised themselves and pretended to be defenseless. They also misled and aggravated the Soldiers to the point in which they fought unarmed personnel. By provoking the Soldier to attack defenseless people, the government were blamed for killing the innocent.

Seeking a political objective was the cause of both Iraq and the Vietnam Wars. The mission was to make a powerful democratic government. The U.S. became involved in both wars under false circumstances. In Vietnam, the U.S. were caught up in the fight and deployed military forces to Southwest Asia after receiving reports that North Vietnam attempted a second strike against U.S. ships in the Gulf. To this date, the government officials never validated the second strike. In contrast, the U.S. invaded Iraq in an effort to remove Saddam Hussein from power with justification that he had weapons of mass destruction. There have been no confirmed reports of weapons of mass destruction in his possession.

### **Techniques insurgents used in Iraq and Vietnam**

Guerilla combat tactics often escalated a conflict in hopes of drawing attention to their cause, expressing grievances or making changes. Although the Vietnam War initially started as a conventional war, it suddenly evolved into counterinsurgency operations. In an effort to change the political government, the insurgents used terrorism. Often times, insurgency harmed, destabilized the government, and motivated the population in hopes that they would join their uprising. Insurgents used armed revolts to start a political or civil party. They used tactics such as sabotage and harassment to undermine the government. A small group of combatants would

use mobile tactics to combat a large or less mobile army. Raids and ambushes were used to kill the enemy. Once the enemy was drawn or separated away from their unit, they would attack all the vulnerable targets in its territory.

Armed propaganda was used and it consisted of kidnapping and terrorist attacks. Over 400 political leaders lost their lives in 1957, and the death toll continued to rise. The killings were intended to scare other political leaders. The terror eventually, flowed into the schools, health care workers, and anyone trying to make a living. By 1958, over twenty percent of the southerners were killed by terrorist acts. They wanted to replace south Vietnam government with National Front Liberation (NLF) leaders. The NLF was composed of two groups called the nationals and the communist. They promised the people patriotism, honesty and good government but their main goal was to reunite the Vietnamese and get the U.S. out of their country.

Violence was one of the main sources of warfare. The insurgents conducted riots, assaults, and organized crime. They even destroyed property to strike fear into people. This violence disturbed the people emotionally as well as mentally. National symbols were attacked to cause disorder in the groundwork of the country. This uproar caused the officials to lose strength and legitimacy. This gave the terrorist more power and made them feel as though they had a reason for starting the war. The terrorist inflicted fear and pain upon their victims. By doing so, they accomplished their goal of informing the public that they are real and meant business. This enabled them to obtain their political or religious views.

### **Factors that contributed to failure in Iraq**

Rumsfeld's doctrine contributed to failures in Iraq. Under his doctrine, he believed that supremacy and precision of the American firepower made up for a smaller amount of military force on the ground. The doctrine called for no help from the UN or NATO. This was a go it alone doctrine for the U. S. with too few troops in Iraq. With very little authority for America and their specially selected ruling body, and no clear exit strategy, this was a disaster waiting to happen. Similar to the situation in Vietnam, within weeks, there were kidnappings, ambushes, counterstrikes, death, and destruction in Iraq. Iraqis started complaining that they were better off with Saddam Hussein. Shite leaders, who tolerated American occupation, became impatient. In hopes of putting together a coalition, President Bush exhausted months trying to come to a mutual agreement with several other countries. Only a few countries decided to help.

During the first weeks of the war, a small number of troops rushed over the barren region of Iraq to capture Baghdad. Because of such small force, this small number of troops simply overlooked several towns, particularly in the center of Sunni. Government officials call Sunni, Saddam Hussein's most dependable and strongest area of support. Sunni dominated twenty percent of Iraq for centuries. Because of the small number of troops, several months passed before military forces invaded Fallujah and surrounding cities.

Failure to implement security measures also contributed to the initial failure in Iraq. At the beginning of the War after Hussein's downfall, the U.S. did not institute security measures. This led to a defeat in establishing lines of authority that we still feel today. Hussein's armed guards and loyal supporters were left to roam the streets, loot and dominate other Iraq cities. The U.S. military could not stop the rampant flow of crime. Moqtada al-Sadr was leader of over 400,000 armed militias in Iraq. The U. S. disbanded his militia. By disbanding Iraq's Army, the



problems got worse. The effort to rebuild Iraq's Army did not work and many personnel in Iraq's Army and police force rebelled and joined the rebels.

### **Factors that contributed to failure in Vietnam**

Planners implemented the Vietnamization policy too late in the process. Because the Southern Vietnam was not in the planning process and empowered with responsibilities, the strategy failed drastically during the spring offenses in 1972. Every since the beginning of the war, South Vietnamese forces were made to feel inferior to American troops and powerless in defending South Vietnam. South Vietnam also viewed the plan as the U.S. strategic goals and not South Vietnam's goals. Failure to empower South Vietnam troops led to failure in the Vietnam War.

Troop withdrawal also contributed to failure in Vietnam. Before Americans properly trained and prepared South Vietnam to take over the mission, they pulled troops out of Vietnam. In Iraq, leaders are implementing similar measures to supply and train the Iraqi forces. Once this happens, the U.S. can transfer authority and allow them to execute more responsibility in the area of security, logistics and maintenance. Until American military forces give the Iraqi Army more power and responsibilities, U.S. military forces will continue to pull security and protect Iraq.

### **Factors that contributed to success in Iraq**

The Surge was the first sign of success in the Iraq conflict. The surge had three goals for success. The first one was to drive a wedge between the Sunni and Al Qaeda. Although the effort is not complete, it has proven to be very successful. The second is to divide the Shia extremist and expand the Shia community. This process is also working. The third goal of the surge is to limit the influence of outside powers. Iran was a major force trying to get involved in the Iraq's war. Increased troops strength was crucial for this not to happen. Iraq used to pass

through lines that troops were not able or willing to protect. Since the surge, U.S. forces guard and close those passages off from outsiders. Reports indicate that American political leaders are finally pursuing classic counterinsurgency strategies that are paying off (Boot, 2007). The fear is that leaders will implement withdrawal plans to pull out of Iraq too soon, just as they did in Vietnam. The consequence of early withdrawal will be devastating, even more so than in Vietnam because Iraq is more valuable strategically (Mckinnon, 2007).

The Iraqification plan, similar to the Vietnamization plan that failed, is a plan to give the Iraqi's control of their country. Although a failure in Vietnam, however, it seems to be effective and successful in Iraq. It will allow the American forces to reduce its presence in Iraq and focus their attention on terrorism in other countries. Pakistan and Afghanistan are where we will found majority of the terrorist hiding out (Hirsh, 2007).

Another success of the Iraq's war is the first time elections. For the first time in Iraq's history, Iraq elected their government leaders. The purpose of an independent Iraq is to attain an Iraqi regime physically powerful enough to allow the U.S. to withdraw (Record, 2006).

Vietnam and Iraq's wars are very similar. Leaders did not implement many of the principles of counterinsurgency operations that they learned during the Vietnam conflict. We continued to repeat some of the same failures and successes. Poor planning, no exit strategy, few troops, and a go it alone attitude has cost numerous American and Iraqis lives. America has spent billions of dollars on both of these wars and counting. Although the surge showed an increase in force, from lessons learned in prior conflicts, the Iraqi governments realize that we do not have very much patience when it comes to staying the course.

### **Conclusion**

In the Iraq and the Vietnam conflicts, we learned many lessons. The mission in both of these conflicts was to make a powerful democratic government. When the insurgents resisted, the mission changed. Neither Vietnam nor Iraq wanted U. S. involved in their conflict. We can use the failures as well as the successes in the Vietnam War to improve tactics and techniques in Iraq. It will take time and patience to defeat the insurgency in Iraq and to establish a free and democratic government. By applying lessons learned from prior conflicts and through proper training we will be able to better prepare our Soldiers to confront and defeat the enemy on the battlefield. Reviewing lessons learned will also save many lives and billions of dollars.

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