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AT VERA CRUZ

Counterinsurgency lessons learned led to success at Vera Cruz

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Outline

Topic #1: Compare and contrast two counterinsurgency campaigns covered in H100 and analyze the root causes of success or failure in each conflict.

1. Thesis Statement. Why the counterinsurgency lessons learned from the Philippines led to the success at Vera Cruz.

2. Major Points.

a. Tactics used in the Philippines compared to the tactics used at Vera Cruz.

b. Lessons learned from prior conflicts.

c. The importance of having clear goals before entering a country.

3. Supporting Points of Evidence.

a. The Philippine War

b. The Vera Cruz Intervention

c. Lessons learned from the Philippine War to the Vera Cruz Intervention.

Abstract

Military Leaders should learn all they can about the tactics used to battle insurgency in the Philippines. These lessons will save the lives of Soldiers and promote what America stands for. All leaders should teach their Soldiers about the culture of the country they are deploying too and exactly what their jobs will be and how to treat and interact with the local population. They must understand that foreign countries would rather be ruled by a local devil than a foreign saint. History does not repeat itself. People repeat themselves.

Throughout history the United States has made some grave mistakes when trying to take control of other countries. Controlling lands outside boundaries of the United States has become a demanding task and we have yet figured out how to accomplish this mission. Many issues arise trying to control countries far from the United States. Elected officials often share different points of view on how to tackle this great task which leads to policy change therefore putting the military in a difficult position. We have made some bad decisions like the purchase of the Philippines from Spain after the Spanish American War.

We owned the Philippines legally as recognized by international law, but not recognized by the Philippine people. The Philippine people had been trying for centuries to gain their independence from Spain control and looked at us as another foreign invader. Countries would rather be controlled by a local devil than a foreign saint. One of the greatest mistakes we make is trying to convert foreign cultures to adopt American ways and forget about their own cultures. When we first took the island of Manila and forced the Spanish out of the country we made some huge mistakes. The insurgents had been surrounding the last Spanish fort for weeks before we arrived and forced the Spanish to leave. Instead of working with the Philippine leadership and sharing the victory together we isolated them and kept them out of the fort and out of the city of Manila. This forced the Philippine leadership to move to other parts of the Island and establish their own local government. This action led the Philippine people to look at us not as a liberator but rather an invader of their country. This action turned the insurgents focus away from the Spanish and onto the Americans. At this point Americans looked at the Philippine people the same way we looked at the Native Americans, they were savages that were uneducated and beneath us.

This way of thinking would prove to be a grave mistake. The Native Americans were easy to control as they were located in the boundaries of the United States, but this line of thinking would be much more difficult trying to control the Philippine people thousands of miles away. We would have to send thousands of Soldiers and supplies several thousands of miles away to a foreign land with a different culture and different diseases. This force would cost millions of dollars on top of the twenty million we had already paid for the islands. Instead of working with Philippine leadership to develop the country and sharing the resources, we tried to control them and convert them into Americans. This is the same concept the English used on us which led to the Revolution in our own country and ultimately our independence. The Philippine insurgents converted to the guerrilla warfare tactics the Native Americans, used which is what most undeveloped countries use when confronted by a superior force. These guerilla tactics caused military commanders to make unsound decisions after suffering casualties under their command.

Military commanders used massacre tactics like we did during the Indian Wars, which lead to the hatred by all Philippine people, not just the insurgents. One of these incidents that took place was known as the “Balangiga massacre”. This massacre took place on the island of Samar. Soldiers serving under the command of General Jake Smith were ambushed at their camp in the town of Balangiga. Insurgents dressed as civilians killed 54 American Soldiers and took 100 rifles in a surprise attack in the early morning hours of September 28, 1901. This incident led to the retaliation order by General Smith to kill every person over the age of ten on the island of Samar. This massacre led to the deaths of thousands of Philippine people of which most were women, children, and elderly people. General Smith also ordered the burning and killing of all animals on the island to make it inhabitable.

General Smith would face a court martial much later for this incident, but not until the damage was done and the reputation of the American people was lost. It would take over 4 years, millions of dollars, and the lives of 4000 Americans and an estimated almost 1 million Philippine people before the insurgent's world surrender to American forces and gain their independence after World War II.

Several mistakes made during the Philippine War and the insurgency that occurred due to the following; We did not promote a local government and work with the leadership of the Philippine people to promote a stable country; We did not invite this leadership to the treaty between the Spanish when it involved their country; We looked down on these people as if they were beneath us because they had a different culture than us; We failed to re-build the infrastructure and gain the trust of the Philippine people; We did not promote American values by conducting war crimes against the Philippine people; and lastly there were no clear goals for military commanders to follow.

Lessons learned during the Philippines would serve General Frederick Funston well 13 years later during the American Occupation of Vera Cruz. Vera Cruz would take place in 1914 after the Tampico Incident that took place in Mexico. Mexico was in the middle of a civil war during this period. Constitutionalist, under the command of Pablo Gonzalez laid siege of federally controlled Tampico and arrested nine US Sailors. This gave President Wilson leverage to get involved in the Mexico Civil War. President Wilson ordered the occupation of Vera Cruz and General Funston was in charge of 4000 Marine ground forces. General Funston had set clear goals during the occupation of Vera Cruz; he would help establish and maintain security within the city; he would work with the local leadership to establish a local government under Mexican control; he would Work with local population to build new road system and greatly improve

sanitation conditions throughout the city; he would build a new job base for the entire city and create an office of civil affairs. General Funston would also implement a vigorous vaccination program that would produce a 25% decline in the death rate.

These tactics would prove to be very successful and help end the civil war in Mexico and help President Wilson use his military to promote peace and stability to a country next to our border. This is one of the first times a President would use the military for political gain and stability for the United States Government.

The mistakes we made in the Philippines are similar to what the U.S. Army faces today in Iraq. America's problem with the Philippine Insurrection stemmed from many factors. Some of which included the Spanish American War Treaty that was approved, the Philippine Policies set by President McKinley, America's Soldiers' actions during the counterinsurgency, and the extent of American support.

With the close of the Spanish American War, America had a dilemma with the Philippines. President William McKinley, the 25th President of the United States, did not clearly comprehend what to do. The President wanted to accomplish a peaceful, democratic, and independent Philippine Country and eventually return them to an independent nation, but he had no clear cut method of accomplishing this action. "Filipinos were shocked when it became known that the Treaty of Paris provided for the United States to purchase the islands from Spain for twenty million dollars" (Deady, 2005).

This quote by Timothy K. Deady lends creditability to the first policy that President McKinley set that was unpopular. The news did not set well at home or with the self-proclaimed President of the Philippines, Emilio Aguinaldo. Deady in 2005 stated, "Aguinaldo was a twenty-nine year-old member of the educated class known as the "illustrados"...Having led an

insurrection against Spanish rule in 1896 was hopeful that the American victory would facilitate Philippine independence.” What was an insurgency with Spain now would become an insurgency with the United States.

The insurgent forces varied between 80,000 and 100,000 with tens of thousands of insurgents in reserve. A huge advantage for the insurgents was that they were conducting operations on their home soil. They knew the lay of the land, choke points, hard to travel avenues of approach, and the best areas to conduct attacks. After all, these insurgents were battle hardened and operationally experienced from fighting the Spanish Army. The insurgents suffered from shortage of weapons and ammunition but they were capable none-the-less to conduct operations against the United States.

Ultimately, the Filipino people lost their insurgency campaign against the Americans. That loss came at a high cost to the Filipinos in terms of deaths of its citizens. What we can take away from this historical lesson is clear. A lack of understanding and underestimation of a culture can also lead to an insurgency that will last a very long time, provide significant challenges to the forces fighting the battle, and unnecessary death on both sides. We are currently experiencing this type of situation in Iraq today.

In conclusion, I have discussed two historical conflicts that are very similar to today’s modern battlefield and conflict. Understanding these lessons would have prevented numerous mistakes in kind to these previous events, thus saving lives and possibly enabling a quicker end to the current conflicts. History is critical to the NCO as he plays a vital role in the planning and execution of missions in today’s Army. We must include history lessons and research into every level of NCOES and Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development Program.

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