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in the Philippines 1899-1902 and Vietnam 1965-1972

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Introduction

The Philippine-American War from 1899-1902 and Vietnam War from 1965-1972 were both American counterinsurgency efforts in Southeast Asia that produced very different results for the United States. The Philippines were ultimately pacified and conquered, while Vietnam resulted in a messy withdrawal and the takeover of South Vietnam by the Communist North. In the Philippines, American troops faced a weak and fractured opposition. Officers were also experienced in dealing with irregular warfare from the Civil War and Indian Wars, allowing them to apply lessons from those conflicts to the fighting on the archipelago. The North Vietnamese and National Liberation Front (the Viet Cong), in contrast, had a sophisticated state infrastructure, well trained troops, and external support from the Communist world. In addition, very few American officers or policy makers had direct experience with insurgency. This research contends that American success in the Philippines was not something that could have been recreated in Vietnam, as the former was a colonial style guerrilla war, while the latter was a civil war between two state actors.

The Philippine War, in some analyses, represents an example of “how to defeat a guerrilla movement.”¹ John M. Gates argued against the drawing any kind of parallel between America’s two interventions in Southeast Asia.² Other scholars posit that the American takeover of the Philippines was more related to the mistakes of the Filipino leader Emilio Aguinaldo and his small base of support. Some renditions of the conflict portray American soldiers as brutal, using their rifles to “civilize” the Filipinos.³ Some scholars have

¹ Anthony James Joes, *America and Guerilla Warfare* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 103.

² John M. Gates, “Philippine Guerillas, American Anti-Imperialists, and the Election of 1900,” *Pacific Historical Review* 46, no. 1 (Feb. 1977): 64, accessed March 18, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3637402>

³ Brian McAllister Linn, *The Philippine War 1899-1902* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 322.

claimed that restraint or benevolence on the part of the Americans are “fictions.”⁴ However, that argument only considers part of the evidence rather than examining the larger context of the actions of American troops.⁵

The Philippine insurgents and Vietnamese communists are part of a much larger story of American counter-insurgency warfare that stretches back to the Revolutionary War.⁶ Other historians place the two conflicts within another context, that of America’s push into East Asia for strategic control. The two conflicts represent important, connected components of this process, rather than two wars that happened independently of one another.⁷

In this light, the Vietnam War and Philippine insurgency are worthy of comparison. Both wars experience a number of competing interpretations. Writing in the wake of the French defeat in Indochina, Bernard Fall assessed that the new era of insurgency required the United States military to conduct “a complete re-thinking of strategic premises on which its military concepts are based.”⁸ During the Vietnam era, academics and some in the US government began to look back on the Philippine-American war and see similarities with the fighting in Southeast Asia.⁹ In Colonel Thomas X. Hammes argued that the American military establishment failed to grasp the implications of the insurgency in South Vietnam, claiming they saw the war as largely a conventional struggle. Hammes, a proponent of Fourth

⁴ Stuart Creighton Miller, *Benevolent Assimilation: The American Conquest of the Philippines, 1899-1903* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 254.

⁵ John Morgan Gates, *Schoolbooks and Krags: The United States Army in the Philippines, 1898-1902* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973), vii-viii.

⁶ Joes 3.

⁷ Michael H. Hunt and Steven Levine, *Arc of Empire: America’s Wars in Asia from the Philippines to Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 1.

⁸ Bernard B. Fall, *Street Without Joy: Indochina at War, 1946-54* (Harrisburg, PA: The Stackpole Company, 1961), 296.

⁹ May, “Why the United States Won,” 353.

Generation Warfare theory (4GW) asserts that Vietnam was a case study in insurgency warfare.¹⁰

More recent scholarship demonstrates that the US military attempted the reassessment Fall advocated after the utter failure of the CIA to conduct effective covert warfare in Vietnam by creating MACV-SOG and other special warfare units to meet the challenges of counterinsurgency.¹¹ Other arguments focus on how media perception of Vietnam shaped its outcome for the US. Prior to the Tet Offensive in January of 1968, it appeared that American and South Vietnamese forces were (slowly) making progress pacifying the country. Much of the problem, according to this view, came from the “conversation gap” between the White House, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), and the media; political support for the war at home was more important than the actual war fighting.¹² American nation building is another area of study for the Vietnam conflict, examining the implications of US programs on the Vietnamese and the implicit ideology of those programs. Nation building and the modernization theory of development in the 1960s drove the civil pacification side of American counterinsurgency doctrine.¹³ Studying Vietnam as a Fourth Generation war, rather than a conventional conflict, assists modern reassessment of American military doctrine. Ironically, this marks a return to what Bernard B. Fall wrote in 1961—four years before the first Marines landed at Da Nang.

¹⁰ Col. Thomas X. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21st Century* (Minneapolis: Zenith Press, 2006), 56-58.

¹¹ Richard H. Schulz, *The Secret War Against Hanoi: The Untold Story of Spies, Saboteurs, and Covert Warriors in North Vietnam* (New York: Perennial, 1999).

¹² Gregory A. Daddis, “Choosing Progress: Evaluating the ‘Salesmanship’ of the Vietnam War,” in *Assessing War: The Challenge of Measuring Success and Failure*, ed. Leo J. Blanken, Hy Rothstein, and Jason J. Lepore (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2015), 174.

¹³ Christopher T. Fisher, “Nation Building and the Vietnam War: A Historiography,” *Pacific Historical Review* 74, no. 3 (August 2005): 441-443, accessed February 28, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/phr.2005.75.3.441>

Confederate Guerrillas, Indian Wars, and Pacific Expansion

The US military had experience dealing with insurgent groups prior to the war in the Philippines. The Confederacy employed famous units of cavalry and other “bushwhackers” as they were called, especially in the West. Following the Civil War, veterans of both sides went west to fight against the Indians. With the closing of the expansion westward completed, the frontier impulse transitioned from within North America to the Pacific. Rather than being a kind of warfare American soldiers were not used to, fighting guerrillas and raiders had been the norm. For the officers of the turn of the century, their experience on the frontier and in the Civil War was their chief frame of reference.

The legacy of the Civil War had left an impression on the generation of officers that led the army during the Philippine War. In 1898 all but one of the Army’s national department commanders had entered the military as volunteers for the Union, and then spent the next several decades fighting natives in the West.¹⁴ The guiding principle of frontier pacification were the Civil War era General Orders 100, instructing the occupying force to restore order to a civilian population—as long as the civilians reciprocated. Civilian assistance to the enemy or resistance to the occupying forces gave American troops permission to retaliate.¹⁵ Confederate raiders forced Federal commanders to commit large numbers of troops to rear area security. In one case, General Grant had 40,000 men deployed away from the front lines during the siege of Vicksburg just to root out Southern guerrillas.¹⁶ In another case, General Sherman issued orders in July 1864 to arrest anyone suspected of

¹⁴ Graham A. Cosmas, *An Army For Empire: The United States Army in the Spanish American War*, 2nd ed. (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing Company, 1994), 11.

¹⁵ Linn, *The Philippine War*, 8-9.

¹⁶ James Anthony Joes, *America and Guerilla Warfare* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 2000), 52.

aiding the enemy and “shoot without mercy all guerrillas.”¹⁷ Missouri had been the most infamous example of guerrilla fighting, creating “a form of terrorism that exceeded anything else in the war.” Elsewhere, Confederate generals had ordered bushwhackers to harass the Union supply train.¹⁸ The Army of Northern Virginia also had its units of sharpshooters, who were not snipers in the modern sense, but men fought in open order to scout and skirmish Union forces.¹⁹ The Civil War experience gave the postwar Army institutional knowledge of fighting irregular enemies.

After 1865, the wars on the frontier against the native Indians informed the military strategies and tactics used in the Philippines. Leaders and the press of the time often drew the comparison. One correspondent said after the Battle of Manila in February of 1899 that “a prolonged Indian-fighting style of campaign may follow.”²⁰ Secretary of War Elihu Root saw the connection between the frontier wars and the Philippine insurgency. When asking Congress in 1900 to pass his Army Bill he said, “[t]he history of our Indian wars is replete with incidents showing the futility [of] sending an inadequate force to bring into subjection hostile natives.”²¹ The US military understood the political dimension of the Plains Indian wars, as the tribes needed to be brought under the authority of the federal government. The US Cavalry used a strategy of “societal disruption,” forcing the Indians to stay on the move

¹⁷ Albert Castel, *Decision in the West: The Atlanta Campaign of 1864* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 348-349.

¹⁸ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 784.

¹⁹ Fred L. Ray, *Shock Troops of the Confederacy: The Sharpshooter Battalions of the Army of Northern Virginia* (Asheville, NC: CFS Press, 2006), xi.

²⁰ Quoted in Linn, *The Philippine War*, 64.

²¹ “SECRETARY ROOT’S ARMY BILL,” *Army and Navy Journal: Gazette of the Regular and Volunteer Forces* 38, no. 14 (December 1, 1900): 317.

and sapping their resources.²² American forces made use of Indian scouts for intelligence. They kept records on the number of animals, weapons, “Indian warriors,” and casualties in each engagement, as well as the number of natives that surrendered to government control.²³ Plains Indians were difficult for Federal forces to locate, but if kept on the move they could be starved out by the start of the winter and made to surrender.²⁴ Given the institutional memory of the wars against the American Indians, civilian and military leadership understood how to conduct a campaign against an irregular force in wilderness areas.

The US underwent more improvements and reforms in the 1880s and 90s. It evolved from a small, defensive military to one capable of long range force projection. The US Army of the late 1800s underwent several reforms. Civil War vintage muzzle-loading artillery was replaced with the latest breech loaders, allowing for more rapid fire. For the infantry, the Army adopted a variant of the Danish Krag-Jorgensen rifle, a bolt-action, smokeless powder rifle. Training shifted from the close order drill to physical fitness, weapons practice, and combat maneuvers. The Army also started to invest far more into the wellbeing of the troops, providing better pay, food, and amenities on bases. As a result, desertion rates dropped.²⁵ Thanks to these improvements, the Regular Army started to become a more respected, professional institution, “gaining constantly in the public estimation.”²⁶ State militias saw reform as well during the 1880s and early 90s. The changes came as a response to failures by the state governments to maintain order during strikes and riots. While far more organized

²² Michael Richardson, “Keep ‘Em Moving: The Role of Assessment in US Cavalry Operations Against the Plains Indians,” in *Assessing War: The Challenge of Measuring Success and Failure*, ed. Leo J. Blanken, Hy Rothstein, and Jason J. Lepore (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2015), 96.

²³ Richardson, “Keep ‘Em Moving,” 96-97.

²⁴ Richardson, “Keep ‘Em Moving,” 104.

²⁵ Graham A. Cosmas, *An Army for Empire: The United States Army in the Spanish-American War*, 2nd ed. (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing Company, 1994) 3-5.

²⁶ “APOTHEOSIS OF THE REGULAR SOLDIER,” *Army and Navy Journal: Gazette of the Regular and Volunteer Forces* 36, no. 1 (September 3, 1898), 2.

than they were at the middle of the century, their value as a fighting force was questioned. Despite the increases in military spending by states, the militias often lacked modern equipment and were forced to use decaying ex-Federal equipment.²⁷ West Coast militia in particular were “not as well drilled or disciplined as those from any State in the East or interior.”²⁸ Some units still elected their officers, a holdover from earlier in the century.²⁹ The federal level reform was part of the larger trend of progressive civil service reform, away from the patronage system of earlier in the nineteenth century. Russell Alger, McKinley’s first Secretary of War, strove to reform the military with particular attention to the well-being of the line soldier. Alger was not suited to large scale administration, but he started the trend of military reform.³⁰ His successor, Elihu Root, was a major proponent of military reform and continued the work Alger had started.³¹

The modernization and reforms were part of a calculated effort on the part of expansionists to project American power overseas, a hotly debated subject at the time. Alfred Thayer Mahan’s 1890 book *The Influence of Sea Power on History* had an impact on the US establishment, and future President Theodore Roosevelt in particular. America needed a fleet, and more importantly coaling stations to secure commercial interests abroad. In 1893, when sugar trust owner Judge Dole fomented a coup to formally annex Hawaii with the support of US Marines, but President Cleveland prevented ratification of the treaty. Emerging

²⁷ Cosmas, *Army for Empire*, 6-8.

²⁸ Maj. Gen. Wesley Merritt to William McKinley, May 13, 1898, in *Correspondence Relating to the War with Spain Including the Insurrection in the Philippines and the China Relief Expedition*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1902), 643.

²⁹ Frederick Funston, *Memories of Two Wars: Cuban and Philippine Experiences* (London: Constable and Co., Limited, 1912), 152.

³⁰ Cosmas, *An Army for Empire*, 53.

³¹ “THE NEW SECRETARY OF WAR,” *Army and Navy Journal: Gazette of the Regular and Volunteer Forces* 37, no. 1 (September 2nd, 1899): 3.

expansionists like Roosevelt saw the incident as a loss for American power.³² In this new westward push, the lucrative markets of China were the end goal.³³ Some Americans, however, were skeptical of colonial ventures, as one travel writer put it, “because we have got enough to look after at home.”³⁴ Nativists on the West Coast were similarly against involvement in East Asia, fearing that low-wage labor might flood the US.³⁵ Racism played some role in the mission to expand US power. An 1899 article described the various peoples of islands as “wholly untameable,” “born pirates,” and “African dwarfs.”³⁶ The Philippine War took place during a period of peak immigration to the US from Eastern and Southern Europe; many Anglo-Americans felt threatened by other races. While the push into East Asia by American policy makers was part of a concerted effort to expand commercial and military influence, the racially charged language was a way to sell the agenda to Americans. Framing the US’s role in the world, and Asia in particular, as an almost divine mission to civilize helped President McKinley build a coalition of support that transcended various divisions in the electorate, most of all the lingering divide from the Civil War.³⁷

The Philippines: From Conventional War to Counterinsurgency

America’s involvement in the Philippines began with the Spanish American War, and after Spain was defeated, Emilio Aguinaldo, leader of the Army of Liberation, expected the Americans give the Filipinos independence. Aguinaldo fought for his idea of a united Philippine Republic. The Philippine War is often roughly divided in a conventional phase

³² Barbara W. Tuchman, *The Proud Tower: A Portrait of the World Before the War 1890-1914* (New York: MacMillan, 1966), 130-131.

³³ Hunt and Levine, *Arc of Empire*, 12-13.

³⁴ Joseph Earle Stevens, *Yesterdays in the Philippines* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1898), xiv.

³⁵ Hunt and Levine, *Arc of Empire*, 13.

³⁶ “CONTEMPORARY INFORMATION ON FILIPINO TRIBES,” *Army and Navy Journal: Gazette of the Regular and Volunteer Forces* vol. 37, no. 1 (Saturday, Sept. 2nd 1899), 2.

³⁷ Hunt and Levine, *Arc of Empire*, 19.

and guerrilla phase, yet the entire war had aspects of insurgency and asymmetrical warfare. At the beginning, American forces and the Army of Liberation fought conventional, “set piece” battles. The Filipino insurgent leaders, despite their use of guerrilla tactics, did not see insurgency as the primary means of conducting the war. Circumstances caused the shift from conventional to irregular warfare after 1900.³⁸

The Filipino insurgency was led by a middle class that had risen thanks to the islands’ cash crop exports, chief among them hemp, coconuts, sugar, and tobacco. Identity in the Philippines was primarily regional for most of its history, but this changed during the nineteenth century. The emerging middle class in the colonial Philippines built a national, rather than regional, identity based partly on shared Malay ancestry. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 provided Spain with easier access to the colony. Greater contact between Spain and the archipelago gave the better educated colonial middle class more exposure to Spanish political thought. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the Filipinos gained some political power in the Spanish legislature. Restoration of these powers was a key tenant in the movement at the end of the century.³⁹ Spanish education allowed the nationalists to communicate their grievances with Spanish rule.⁴⁰ Emilio Aguinaldo built an insurgency on Luzon around several issues that Filipinos of the gentry class agreed upon: representation in the Spanish assembly, expelling the religious orders, and ending discriminatory laws.⁴¹ The nationalist movement marked a shift away from the local, tribal, or linguistic identity of earlier Filipino history by the middle class on Luzon. “Filipino” identification did not extend to all of the islands. The Vietnamese fifty years later had greater ethnic homogeneity, as well

³⁸Linn, *The Philippine War*, 185.

³⁹ Usha Mahajani, *Philippine Nationalism: External Challenge and Filipino Response 1565-1946* (St Lucia, Australia: University of Queensland Press, 1971), 36-37.

⁴⁰ Mahajani, *Philippine Nationalism*, 52.

⁴¹ Linn, *The Philippine War*, 18-19.

as better political infrastructure to mobilize their insurgency. The human and physical geography of the Philippines made it difficult for Aguinaldo to build a larger coalition of support.

The Filipino insurgency began as an independence movement against the Spanish, backed by the US during the Spanish-American War, and then turned against the US after the peace with Spain. The initial uprisings in the Philippines broke out from August 26th to the 31st, 1896 in the Manila and Cavite provinces. After several months of fighting, Aguinaldo established a headquarters in a rural area of Bulacan, in southern Luzon. Once there, he declared the Republic of the Philippines in late May 1897. The revolutionary government eventually negotiated a treaty with the Spanish, but the colonial authorities did not accept any of the insurgents' demands. Aguinaldo and his confidants went into exile.⁴² American consul Rounseville Wildman met with members of the "junta" in Hong Kong in October and November 1897 to discuss possible support for the guerrillas.⁴³ Aguinaldo had believed he would be given leadership of the islands by the Americans after Wildman promised him a cache of weapons. "Mr. Wildman strongly advised me to establish a Dictatorship," the insurgent leader wrote.⁴⁴ Wildman accepted a position as treasurer to Aguinaldo's "Patriotic League Fund" as well.⁴⁵ Once Spain was engaged with the United States, Aguinaldo renewed his insurgency in the Philippines hoping to broker some kind of independence, even if it meant annexation or American protection.⁴⁶ Aguinaldo believed that the US would support his independence gambit; his 1899 account of the insurrection against the Spanish is

⁴² Emilio Aguinaldo, *True Version of the Philippine Revolution* (Farlak, Philippines: 1899), 1-6.

⁴³ Mahajani, *Philippine Nationalism*, 87.

⁴⁴ Aguinaldo, *True Version*, 15.

⁴⁵ Karl Irving Faust, *Campaigning in the Philippines* (San Francisco: The Hicks-Judd Company Publishers, 1899), 43.

⁴⁶ Hunt and Levine, *Arc of Empire*, 28-29.

addressed “especially to the great North American Republic.”⁴⁷ Filipinos initially welcomed Americans, as one consul noted in his May 1898 report to the Secretary of State. The assessment also speculated on arming the estimated 37,000 insurgents with captured Spanish weapons, and that “few United States troops will be needed for conquest.”⁴⁸ The United States helped build up the enemy they later fought to dislodge the Spanish, and gave the Filipinos expectations of independence. Unlike the Vietnamese insurgency decades later, the Filipinos lacked significant external support. Aguinaldo’s forces were relatively small compared to the Viet Cong or North Vietnamese Army.

Tension was in the air the moment American troops arrived in the Philippines, taking Manila without support from the insurgents on August 13, 1898.⁴⁹ Over the next few months, American soldiers and Filipino fighters exchanged threats, with the guerrillas showing an “aggressive spirit.”⁵⁰ During the initial occupation, US forces worked at rebuilding Manila—providing healthcare, restoring schools, and bringing back law and order.⁵¹ The military established a court for criminal cases, improved public sanitation, and even vaccinated against smallpox, preventing an epidemic. The assistance, however, was predicated on the conditions of General Order 100—Filipinos were not to incite violence against the Americans.⁵² On January 10th 1899, General Otis sent a telegram reporting the guerrillas “increasing their force about the city,” and speculating that the civilian populace might join them in a revolt.⁵³ US efforts at building up the city showed they were more capable

⁴⁷ Aguinaldo, *True Version*, i.

⁴⁸ Oscar F. Williams to William R. Day, May 12, 1898 in *Correspondence Relating to the War with Spain*, 718-719.

⁴⁹ Hunt and Levine, *Arc of Empire*, 31.

⁵⁰ Funston, *Memories of Two Wars*, 176.

⁵¹ Hunt and Levine, *Arc of Empire*, 34.

⁵² Gates, *Schoolbooks and Krags*, 56-58.

⁵³ Gen. Elwell Stephen Otis to Adjutant General, January 10, 1899, in *Correspondence Relating to the War with Spain*, 876.

providing a physical and political infrastructure to fill the vacuum left by the Spanish withdrawal. Aguinaldo had not been able to create during his exile in Hong Kong. The insurgency was at an immediate position of weakness. They were able to mobilize the civilian population somewhat, but the Americans were able to rebuild Manila and restore order.

The Battle of Manila on February 4, 1899 marked the start of hostilities between the Americans and Aguinaldo's army. The insurgents finally put into use the perimeter of earthworks and artillery they had built up around the city since the Americans occupied it the previous year. Insurgents had smuggled weapons into the city itself and directed the civilian population to help the Army of Liberation.⁵⁴ The guerrillas assaulted American lines around 8:45 PM on February 4, with renewed attacks throughout the night. US forces repulsed them and held their positions, and then followed up with their own counterattack at dawn, driving the Filipinos from their defenses. The Americans discovered after the initial attack the insurgents were fairly well armed; Aguinaldo had procured Mauser rifles and modern artillery for the Army of Liberation. This initial guerrilla offensive, however, was unsuccessful wresting Manila from the Americans.⁵⁵ The "lines" were fluid. Units communicated via telegraphs or rocket signals, forming easily cut off ports in a sea of hostile territory.⁵⁶ One factor in the Americans' favor despite this was their proximity to the city, allowing for quicker resupply and reinforcement.⁵⁷ Despite the advantages held by the insurgency, the quality of their troops hampered a potential breakthrough to link up with rebels within the city. Poor quality of the Filipino fighters had been proven when US forces

⁵⁴ Linn, *The Philippine War*, 42.

⁵⁵ Otis to Adjutant General, February 5, 1899, in *Correspondence Relating to the War with Spain*, 894.

⁵⁶ Linn, *The Philippine War*, 44.

⁵⁷ Faust, *Campaigning in the Philippines*, 126.

took Manila from the Spanish. The Filipinos vacated trenches and other defensive positions, leaving areas unguarded, and guerrilla officers could barely control their men.⁵⁸ Following the major February 4-5th action, fighting continued around the city until the 23rd, with the destruction of the northern suburbs. By the 25th, Otis cabled that all was “progressing favorably.”⁵⁹ The Battle of Manila had been a major rout by the Americans of the insurgent forces in conventional fighting, and a prelude to the rest of the 1899 campaigns.

Philippine geography would present the US with a number of challenges as well. US troops in the Philippines soon learned the struggles the land itself presented. Long term campaigning on one of the island interiors, rather than security in one of the towns, meant that “nature was sometimes a more formidable opponent than any armed foe.” A platoon’s trek on any given day might start in hot, dry dust and end in mud and rain. They might have had to cut through thick bush, wade through swamps and rice paddies, and then cross mountains or hills. Disease ravaged many units, leaving only a handful of men fit for operations.⁶⁰ Campaigning slowed down in the monsoon season, and troops only conducted “minor military operations.”⁶¹ The tropical climate necessitated new equipment for the troops, especially better uniforms. In late, 1899 the Inspector General of the US Volunteers just started to test new linen and cotton “suits” for the troops abroad.⁶²

American leadership in-theater was provided by veterans of the Civil War and plains wars, or otherwise capable commanders. Merritt’s tenure as proconsul to the islands ended

⁵⁸ Faust, *Campaigning in the Philippines*, 75.

⁵⁹ Linn, *The Philippine War*, 61; Otis to Adjutant General, February 25th, 1899, in *Correspondence Relating to the War with Spain*, 916.

⁶⁰ Linn, *The Philippine War*, 90.

⁶¹ Quoted in Linn, *The Philippine War*, 121.

⁶² *Army and Navy Journal: Gazette of the Regular and Volunteer Forces* vol. 37, no. 1 (Saturday, Sept. 2nd 1899): 2.

early in the war; he requested to be relieved of duty on August 25, 1898.⁶³ The American forces were led by Elwell S. Otis, a veteran of both the Civil War and Indian Wars. He turned out to be a controversial general. He was maligned by both Arthur MacArthur and Admiral Dewey, and later historians have been critical of his abilities as a commander. These criticisms have merit. Otis underestimated the insurgency and gave his subordinate commanders in the field too few supplies. While less adept at conventional military matters, he was able to navigate the civil aspects of the conflict, vital for any counterinsurgency effort.⁶⁴ Otis, despite his negative qualities, led the American forces to their first major victory over the insurgency. After February, the Americans maintained an offensive against the Luzon guerrillas, and by November they broke Aguinaldo's army and sent him into hiding in the mountains in the northern part of the island.⁶⁵

The conventional fighting, however, revealed some cracks in American capabilities. State volunteer units, like Colonel Funston's unit, were still equipped with the single-shot Springfield rifles of Indian War vintage. These "Trapdoor" rifles were also black powder weapons, while the insurgents' smokeless powder Mausers were the most modern small arms of the period.⁶⁶ Hotchkiss revolving guns, an early form of machine gun similar to the Gatling, proved unreliable because of lack of modern propellant rounds during the battles in and around Manila.⁶⁷ Modern historians have characterized the Volunteer units as unusually violent. Officers at the time noted their lack of discipline.⁶⁸ After several months under

⁶³ Linn, *The Philippine War*, 27.

⁶⁴ Linn, *The Philippine War*, 29.

⁶⁵ Andrew J. Birtle, *US Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine 1860-1941* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History United States Army, 2009), 110.

⁶⁶ Funston, *Memories of Two Wars*, 225.

⁶⁷ "THE HOTCHKISS GUN IN MANILA," *Army and Navy Journal: Gazette of the Regular and Volunteer Forces* vol. 36, no. 42 (June 17, 1899), 994.

⁶⁸ Hunt and Levine, *Arc of Empire*, 40.

discipline, they started to match the quality of the Regulars.⁶⁹ The conduct of the war was a matter of debate at the time, especially after the early 1899 fighting. Postwar inquiries and subsequent research document fifty seven cases of prisoner or civilian murder by the US troops, use of the “water cure” (a torture technique), and other forms of torture.⁷⁰

In Washington, McKinley faced criticism for the Philippine situation, something advocates of expansion characterized as “National cowardice.” Despite the warning signs of open conflict seen by troops stationed on Luzon during the initial occupation, the outbreak of the war took Americans at home by surprise.⁷¹ The first year of the conflict also demonstrated that the “benevolent assimilation” policy directed by McKinley encountered setbacks because of the Filipinos’ vastly different culture. Under Spanish rule, the Filipinos were used to rule by the few colonial elite. Aguinaldo’s Army of Liberation reflected this as well, given they were from the rising native middle class. Building a democratic system in the archipelago ran contrary to centuries of colonial rule. Further, McKinley gave little instruction as to how American commanders and consuls were to proceed with the benevolent assimilation project.⁷² Unlike in Vietnam, the Americans entered a power vacuum. Aguinaldo did not have total political control over the archipelago, or even on his native Luzon. Similarly, the US was not backing an existing ineffective government as was the case with South Vietnam. This allowed the US to set up more effective control and build up their administration of the islands.

⁶⁹ “VOLUNTEERS IN THE PHILIPPINES.” *New York Times (1857-1922)*, Mar 29, 1899. <https://search-proquest-com.proxy-su.researchport.umd.edu/docview/95721022?accountid=28711>.

⁷⁰ Richard E. Welch, Jr, “American Atrocities in the Philippines: The Indictment and the Response,” *Pacific Historical Review* 43, no. 2 (May, 1974): 234.

⁷¹ “MR. PLATT DEFENDS THE PRESIDENT.” *New York Times (1857-1922)*, Jul 20, 1899. <https://search-proquest-com.proxy-su.researchport.umd.edu/docview/95675115?accountid=28711>.

⁷² Birtle, *Doctrine 1860-1941*, 100.

The lack of guidance as to how US forces were to set up government on islands meant commanders had to create their own strategies, which proved helpful to the war effort. In addition, there was prevailing sentiment that the nation building process would take decades, which the Indian War veterans knew well. Force alone was seen as ineffective and antithetical to furthering American pacification goals.⁷³ The military government on Negros, fourth largest island in the archipelago, was an example of effective benevolent assimilation. Brig. Gen. James F. Smith and the 1st California Volunteer Infantry governed island, focusing on both humanitarian and military operations. Smith was a Catholic, lawyer, and capable politician. In order to incorporate the Filipinos into the American occupation government, he recruited a 200 man paramilitary police force that also served as guides for American troops.⁷⁴ US efforts on Negros were greatly aided by the islanders' desire for protection and assistance.⁷⁵ Smith's government on Negros gained legitimacy in part because the islanders wanted protection from "raids of hill robbers."⁷⁶ The local upper class, consisting of planters and merchants, also supported the American occupation.⁷⁷ In addition to the civil adaptations Smith made on Negros, he targeted specific enemy strong points and wiped them out, rather than sending patrols into the interior to hunt insurgents.⁷⁸ Due to the divided nature of the Filipinos along tribal, linguistic, and ethnic lines, the Army of Liberation looked to the Cavite region on Luzon for support, not universally across the archipelago. These divisions among the resistance aided American pacification efforts.

⁷³ Birtle, *Doctrine 1860-1941*, 103.

⁷⁴ Linn, *The Philippine War*, 76.

⁷⁵ Otis to Adjutant General, March 16, 1899, in *Correspondence Relating to the War with Spain*, 935.

⁷⁶ Otis to Adjutant General, March 28, 1899 in *Correspondence Relating to the War with Spain*, 949.

⁷⁷ Linn, *The Philippine War*, 82.

⁷⁸ Linn, *The Philippine War*, 80-81; Elwell S. Otis, "REPORT OF MAJOR GENERAL OTIS," *Army and Navy Journal: Gazette of the Regular and Volunteer Forces* 37, no. 15 (December 9, 1899): 338.

While the Negros and the other islands in the Visayas were slowly pacified with limited troops, Otis focused his efforts on Luzon in the spring and summer months of 1899. He saw Aguinaldo and his Tagalog base of support as the main enemy, believing that the Pampagans, Pangasins, and Ilocanos were waiting for the Americans to free them from the Army of Liberation.⁷⁹ In May, the Americans were operating north of Manila; the insurgents became active in the Cavite and Morong provinces, south and east of the city. By the end of the month the insurgent general Pilar was attacking the towns east of Manila. General Lawton gathered a force and pushed the insurgents back starting June 3rd.⁸⁰ The insurgency eroded internally over the summer months. Aguinaldo assassinated one of his top generals, Antonio Luna, on June 5. Luna was not an effective commander on the battlefield, but he had been able to inspire the Army of Liberation. After Luna's death, Aguinaldo was unable to rally his army and it became a loose collection of free companies, rather than a unified force.⁸¹ The further breakdown of the guerrilla army helped the Americans. This was something that did not occur during the Vietnam War. While the Viet Cong had been eliminated on the battlefield as a serious force after the Tet Offensive, the North Vietnamese state and army was still able to maintain cohesion and discipline. Aguinaldo's army transitioned into a true guerrilla force, whereas the later Viet Cong were professional soldiers who applied irregular tactics.

At the end of 1899, Otis expected full pacification in the near future. In his annual report he announced that "The insurgent forces are not to be feared except as they oppress their own people." The Americans had restored law and order to Manila, allowing trade to resume, and helped set up a local, Filipino-run government. The insurgents and their

⁷⁹ Linn, *The Philippine War*, 88.

⁸⁰ Otis, "REPORT," 339.

⁸¹ Linn, *The Philippine War*, 136-137.

supporters, according to the general, were still angered that the Americans had not given them the kind of administration they wanted, and had not expelled the Roman Catholic clergy from the Philippines. Ironically, these were the same friars who reportedly assisted the insurgents against the Americans.⁸² In December of 1899 the insurgents had to propagandize the civilian population to build support; on Negros, three “junta” agents from Hong Kong, with a force of 300 Tagalogs, “announced great victories in Luzon.” This incident showed desperation on the part of some of the insurgents.⁸³ The insurgents’ conventional tactics on the battlefield played to the Americans’ strengths, and they had paid bitterly for it.

The failure of the conventional war by the Filipinos prompted a change in tactics to guerrilla war, and the Americans had to shift their response. Benevolent assimilation gave way to more extreme punitive measures. The guerrilla war turned the conflict into a series of regional struggles between loose bands of partisans. The guerrillas lacked a unified military and political organization, which accounted for the eventual American success.⁸⁴ Recruiting Macabebes and other Filipinos as auxiliary forces also undermined unity in the insurgent forces.⁸⁵ As the year went on, field commanders began to work independently of the benevolent assimilation directives of Manila, and adopted harsher methods against the insurgents.⁸⁶ American reports characterized the guerrillas as “bolo men and armed insurgent robbers,” rather than members of Aguinaldo’s army. They also noted that many members of the Army of Liberation were deserting what remained and heading home in January 1900.⁸⁷ Combat became “short and snappy...At close range” in contrast to the much more drawn out

⁸² Otis, “REPORT,” 340.

⁸³ Otis to Adjutant General, December 19th, 1899 in *Correspondence Relating to the War with Spain*, 1123.

⁸⁴ Linn, *The Philippine War*, 185.

⁸⁵ Birtle, *Doctrine 1860-1941*, 116.

⁸⁶ Birtle, *Doctrine 1860-1941*, 127.

⁸⁷ Otis to Adjutant General, January 15, 1900 in *Correspondence Relating to the War with Spain*, 1132.

battles of earlier in the war.⁸⁸ Otis remained in command from January to May, until Arthur MacArthur succeeded him.

Otis believed the war was reaching its conclusion in the spring of 1900. Organized guerrilla resistance was crumbling and the Americans' primary concern was with stable government and rule of law. His pacification plans continued to focus on the creation of municipal governments, headed by the Filipinos. In March of 1900, he appointed lawyer Cayetano Arellano to head a board to establish "a more systematic and orthodox system of governments." Don Florentino Torres was appointed attorney general of the islands. The other initial members of this committee, however, were American officers tasked with handling criminal law.⁸⁹ The Americans made significant progress combatting the deteriorating insurgency. Secretary of War Root sent Otis an AP report alleging officers needed reinforcements, and that morale was low because of "constant vigilance" required from troops. The AP report claimed that Southern Luzon was only barely controlled by US forces.⁹⁰ This was inaccurate, however. Otis clarified the situation, which was overall positive. Aguinaldo and his remaining troops had retreated to the north of Luzon, estimated at around 600 men by the Americans. Guerrillas did not attack the Americans unless "in brush country." He wrote to the Root, that they "no longer deal with organized insurrection, but brigandage," and putting a complete stop to it would require hundreds of thousands of troops. He was confident that American pacification and stable government in the islands were within reach.⁹¹ From January to April, fighting had been 124 "mostly very slight affairs." Insurgent officers were surrendering to the US and the pacification situation

⁸⁸ Funston, *Memories of Two Wars*, 305.

⁸⁹ CIVIL RULE FOR FILIPINOS. (1900, Mar 11). *New York Times (1857-1922)* Retrieved from <https://search.proquest.com/docview/95938239?accountid=28711>

⁹⁰ Root to Otis, April 9, 1900 in *Correspondence Relating*, 1158.

⁹¹ Otis to Root, April 10, 1900 in *Correspondence Relating*, 1159.

appeared to be improving.⁹² During the spring, troops took over eleven locations in Mindanao and three in the Jolo islands without a fight, capturing over two hundred small arms and 97 artillery guns.⁹³ With war appearing to draw to a close, he advised the War Department against troop reductions in the islands.⁹⁴ The slow implosion of the organized nationalist insurgency showed that US operations were more of a police operation than a war against a disciplined guerrilla army. Filipino fighters at the turn of the century were much closer to 1960s romantic notions of guerrilla fighters than the Viet Cong ever were. Earlier problems of the Filipino forces such as lack of weapons and discipline only worsened as central command broke down between Aguinaldo and the units of the Army of Liberation.

While the fighting continued on the islands, the election year of 1900 was a referendum on the question of national expansion. William Jennings Bryan's populist platform stood for anti-imperialism and a silver standard, whereas McKinley ran on pro-expansion and the gold standard. Republican rhetoric downplayed imperialism as the reason for Philippine expansion, focusing on the humanitarian aspects of the war effort. Democrat opinions on the war varied by region. Southerners were most in favor of it. Bryan's appeal was heavily tied to the currency debate, and his anti-expansion stance made him lose support in the South and West.⁹⁵ The insurgents paid attention to the election, hoping for a Bryan victory.⁹⁶ He had campaigned against American expansion abroad, on the grounds that it was antithetical to the founding principles of the nation. In a speech about intervention in Cuba he said that the US "must give up any intention of entering upon a colonial policy." He wished

⁹² Otis to Adjutant General, April 3 1900 in *Correspondence Relating*, 1156-1157.

⁹³ Otis to Adjutant General, April 9, 1900 in *Correspondence Relating*, 1158.

⁹⁴ "ARMY NOTES," *Army Navy Journal* 37, no. 34 (April 21, 1900): 791.

⁹⁵ Jeffrey W. Meiser, *Power and Restraint: The Rise of the United States 1898-1941* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2015), 65-66.

⁹⁶ Birtle, *Doctrine 1860-1941*, 126.

to grant independence to all of the territories seized from Spain.⁹⁷ The conduct of the war drew some to Bryan, such as one New York Times reader who referred to the “revengeful carnage” of the troops, and that the Republicans could not be voted for with a “clear conscience.”⁹⁸ Republicans, particularly those in the growing Progressive movement, believed it was the God-given duty of Americans to spread “civilization and liberty” to the Filipinos. Anti-expansion Senators attacked this rhetoric in debates. Senators like Albert J. Beveridge of Indiana said the mission of the “English-speaking and Teutonic peoples” was to “administer government among savage and senile peoples.” President McKinley likewise emphasized the reconstruction and aid the military had provided for the islands.⁹⁹

While Otis’ focus on the benevolent measures proved fruitful, there had been some neglect in the martial aspects of pacification. Arthur MacArthur succeeded Otis in May. Benevolent assimilation had made “substantial gains,” as many towns had local governments and infrastructure steadily returned to the islands. MacArthur, however, noticed that the military side of the counterinsurgency effort was slipping. Engagements and casualties almost matched the scope of the conventional fighting the previous year.¹⁰⁰ MacArthur still built upon the benevolent measures started by Otis, but balanced it with more extreme military measures. In June he issued an amnesty to any Filipino combatants provided they “renounce all connection” to insurgency and accepted American authority over the islands. Only war criminals were exempted from the declaration.¹⁰¹ Aguinaldo was still in the field and denounced the amnesty, and fighting continued, with the Americans beginning to crush

⁹⁷ William Jennings Bryan, “The Savannah Interview” in *Republic or Empire: The Philippine Question* (Chicago: The Independence Company, 1899), 13-14.

⁹⁸ Thomas Elgar, “CARNAGE IN THE PHILIPPINES.” *New York Times* (1857-1922), Aug 03, 1900. <https://search-proquest-com.proxy-su.researchport.umd.edu/docview/95987184?accountid=28711>.

⁹⁹ “WOLCOTT USED AS LASH: Scathing Criticism of Senators Pettigrew and Beveridge,” *New York Times* (1857-1922), Jan 16, 1900.

¹⁰⁰ Linn, *The Philippine War*, 209.

¹⁰¹ “AMNESTY FOR THE FILIPINOS” in *Army Navy Journal and Gazette* 37, no 43 (June 23, 1900): 1023.

the insurgent forces.¹⁰² MacArthur took a much harder line than Otis or the President when it came to pacification, noting in his annual report that the Filipinos were eager for material benefits of American occupation, but that they were reluctant to support municipal governments. MacArthur's strategy from late 1900 to the summer of 1901 involved more effective regional sweeps. Campaigns became increasingly punitive, resembling the total war tactics employed by Sherman during the Civil War.¹⁰³ That fall, a civilian government took over control of islands from the Army, except for areas still facing guerrilla or bandit threats.¹⁰⁴ MacArthur, however, was not a popular commander, and rarely left Manila or even met with his immediate subordinates.¹⁰⁵ Guerrilla ambushes continued into the end of the year, and in December 1900 MacArthur issued a proclamation that called for extreme punishment against the Filipinos who supported the insurgency, as well as "never ceasing patrols, explorations, escorts, outposts, etc."¹⁰⁶

The bulk of insurgent activity late in the war was situated in southwestern Luzon, where local elites coerced the civilian population into fighting or assisting the guerrillas. Fortunately for the Americans, they were unable to achieve cohesion beyond small units of 30 men and one or two officers.¹⁰⁷ Operations in the Batangas province were an example of the punitive campaigns of 1900-1901. The province's insurgents did not face heavy fighting during the initial phase of the war. US troops occupied Batangas in January of 1900, capturing the major towns. Partisan forces, however, could not be pacified and Brigadier General J. Franklin Bell was assigned to put an end to the fighting. He concentrated civilians

¹⁰² Mahajani, *Philippine Nationalism*, 182.

¹⁰³ Linn, *The Philippine War*, 212-215.

¹⁰⁴ Birtle, *Doctrine 1860-1941*, 122.

¹⁰⁵ Linn, *The Philippine War*, 218.

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in Mahajani, *Philippine Nationalism*, 184.

¹⁰⁷ Linn, *The Philippine War*, 288.

in specific zones within the occupied towns, which often lacked food and housing. Outside of these zones, soldiers were given complete freedom to pursue the enemy and destroy material. They stepped up patrols and captured a high number of starved insurgents. Batangueno resistance withered away, with its leader finally surrendering in April 1902.¹⁰⁸ The sweeps in the Batangas and other islands used the same anti-guerrilla tactics as the Civil War and Indian Wars. Cavalry, operating both mounted and dismounted, proved more effective in some cases where regular infantry would be too exhausted to fight after marching across the Philippines' difficult terrain.¹⁰⁹ The repression of both the guerrillas and their civilian support was critical to successful pacification. By mid-1901, the insurgency began crumble even further.

The insurgency formally ended in 1901 after the capture of Emilio Aguinaldo and surrender of other partisan bands still in the field. The Americans captured communications from insurgent troops to their leader. Funston wrote that American forces "had almost worn ourselves out chasing these marauders" and hoped the capture would end the war.¹¹⁰ Once they located his position, Funston's expedition of eighty nine men made up of Americans and Macabebe Scouts landed at Casiguran Bay.¹¹¹ The Scouts questioned the Casiguran locals and they eventually located Aguinaldo. Contrary to the American assumption that Aguinaldo secretly managed the various partisan bands, he told Funston that he had little control over them.¹¹² The timing was critical as well; guerrilla activity on Panay, Mindanao, and Bulacan Province ended the same week.¹¹³ General MacArthur treated Aguinaldo well, giving him a

¹⁰⁸ Glenn A. May, "Resistance and Collaboration in the Philippine War: The Case of Batangas," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 15, no. 1 (March, 1984): 71.

¹⁰⁹ "TROOPS REQUIRED FOR THE PHILIPPINES," *Army Navy Journal* 38, no. 26 (February 23, 1901): 616.

¹¹⁰ Funston, *Memories of Two Wars*, 384-385.

¹¹¹ Funston, *Memories of Two Wars*, 404.

¹¹² Funston, *Memories of Two Wars*, 421-422.

¹¹³ Linn, *The Philippine War*, 275-276.

house in Manilla, and reunited him with his family. The now-retired insurgent leader issued an order for the remaining insurgents to surrender to American authority. This made many insurgents surrender, but still persisted in some parts of the archipelago.¹¹⁴ Aguinaldo's capture was "a crowning glory" for the Americans and put them one step closer to victory. Many surrendered after the capture, but others continued resistance into 1902 and after. The war formally ended on July 4, 1902 by declaration of President Roosevelt that included another amnesty for remaining insurgents.¹¹⁵ American attention turned to business in the islands, such as reforming old Spanish commercial laws still in effect, bringing skilled labor in, and continuing to educate Filipinos.¹¹⁶ Despite the formal end to the war, small bandit groups continued a terror campaign across the archipelago for years afterward. These were perpetrated by Filipino veterans who made "a living by robbery on the pretext of terrorism." Filipinos who worked for the American government were often assassinated.¹¹⁷

The United States' success in the Philippines came from both American military skill and the weakness of the fractured Filipino resistance. Aguinaldo and the other guerrilla commanders lacked any kind of external support, limiting their sources of modern weapons and other supplies. American public opinion was in favor of involvement, demonstrated by the election results in 1900. The declaration of guerrilla war in 1900 shifted the character of the conflict to more of an anti-bandit operation, given that the Filipino fighters lacked central command and organization. The Vietnam War a half a century later was a radically different. The war in the Philippines was more of a "classic" insurgency; the partisans did not have the support of a state or other external actor. Even American victory has some qualifications, as

¹¹⁴ Funston, *Memories of Two Wars*, 425-428.

¹¹⁵ Mahajani, *Philippine Nationalism*, 188.

¹¹⁶ Edwin Wildman, "STUMBLING BLOCKS TO PACIFICATION AND DEVELOPMENT," *New York Times* (1857-1922), May 11, 1902.

¹¹⁷ Mahajani, *Philippine Nationalism*, 189-191.

banditry continued and the Moro Rebellion in southern Mindanao persisted until 1913.

American leaders who had lived through the taming of the frontier, however, knew that such an effort would take years for complete pacification. Most importantly, they were able to defeat the main force of the insurgency and capture Aguinaldo. American rule persisted on the archipelago until after WWII.

Vietnam: Pre-War Consciousness of Counterinsurgency Challenges

Vietnam had a long history of combatting foreign invasions, dating back to a revolt against the Chinese Empire. After a 1000 year period of independence, the French annexed the country as a colony in the late nineteenth century.¹¹⁸ The French wanted a base of operations in East Asia to counter the British in Hong Kong. Vietnamese persecution of Catholics gave them a pretext to shell Da Nang in 1858 and seize Saigon in 1859, the latter formally signed to the French in 1862. They built up a colony in Cochinchina, the area that later became South Vietnam and Laos. During this time the Chinese claimed control over the region, primarily to act as a buffer for their southern border. Over the next two decades, the French worked their way up to Hanoi, removing Vietnam from nominal Chinese control and into theirs in 1884.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Harvey H. Smith, Donald W. Bernier, Fredrica M. Bunge, Frances Chadwick Rintz, Rinn-Sup Shinn, and Suzanne Teleki, *Area Handbook for South Vietnam* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1967), 1.

¹¹⁹ Douglas Porch, *The French Foreign Legion: A Complete History of the Legendary Fighting Force* (1991; repr., New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2010), 203-205.

The French experience in the Indochina War had been the most recent and instructive for the Americans. Despite a wealth of documentation at the time, many of the French missteps in the region were repeated by the Americans. Bernard Fall had documented the saga of the French army's struggle against the Viet Minh in his 1961 book *Street Without Joy*. Fall blended conventional history writing with first-hand accounts from his time embedded with troops in Indochina during the war. Fall was a critic of the French approach to war in Indochina, and acutely aware of the problems Western armies of the time had with insurgent warfare. Writing on the then-contemporary Algerian War in 1961, "a luxury of materiel and manpower" had not produced a victory against only 35,000 insurgents. French forces in Algeria had the air-mobile helicopter and airborne units the Indochina soldiers had "only dreamed about."¹²⁰ French commanders like Navarre did not understand their opponents. The Vietnamese used the doctrine of "people's war" developed by Mao in the Chinese Civil War.¹²¹ The fall of China to the Communists in 1949 also gave the Viet-Minh a safe haven to resupply and train troops against the French. With Communist China in play during the French war, it "doomed all...chances of full victory."¹²² Literature of the time illustrated the France's anti-guerrilla blunders in Indochina and Algeria with novels like Graham Greene's *The Quiet American*¹²³ or Jean Larteguey's *The Centurions*.¹²⁴ Despite all of the international drama surrounding the French Indochina conflict, presidential administrations and Americans saw Vietnam as a distant event. Vietnam was not a national issue until 1964-65.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 297.

¹²¹ Hammes, *Sling and the Stone*, 59-60.

¹²² Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 27.

¹²³ Graham Greene, *The Quiet American* (1955; repr., New York: Penguin Books, 2004).

¹²⁴ Jean Larteguey, *The Centurions*, trans. Xan Fielding (1960; repr., New York: Penguin Books, 2015).

¹²⁵ Michael P. Sullivan, *The Vietnam War: A Study in the Making of American Policy* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985), 152.

How the United States entered the conflict in Vietnam was a significant reason for this lack of attention. The French-Vietnamese war was framed as a decolonization war, with the Viet-Minh as independence fighters, not Communist supported insurgents. Following the partition, Eisenhower sent limited numbers of advisers to the South Vietnamese under the auspices of the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG). It was with the Kennedy and then Johnson administration that policy shifted. Defense Secretary Robert McNamara and his colleagues approached the war in terms of rational choice and systems analysis—essentially seeing the conflict as a mathematical equation. They termed their policy “graduated pressure” against North Vietnam. The decision to go forward with a gradual strategy created issues for the various American entities in country, since “no one decision led to war.”¹²⁶ Graduated pressure came out of the Kennedy administration for two reasons. First, they had near constant foreign policy crises in other theatres of the Cold War, such as Laos, the Congo, and Cuba.¹²⁷ Secondly, managerialism played a decisive role shaping American policy toward Vietnam.

Managerialism was the ideology that determined American policy in all areas following the Second World War. James Burnham, himself a Marxist who later turned to the American conservative movement, argued in his 1941 book *The Managerial Revolution* that market capitalism was fading but that rule by managers, not state socialism, was coming to replace it. Policy going into the future, Burnham argued, was to be made by “business executives, technicians, bureaucrats and soldiers.”¹²⁸ This policy-by-managers approach was

¹²⁶ H.R. McMaster, “The Human Element: When Gadgetry Becomes Strategy,” *World Affairs* 17, no. 3 (Winter 2009): 34-35.

¹²⁷ Halberstram, *Best and Brightest*, 102.

¹²⁸ James Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution: What is Happening in the World* (New York: John Day Co., 1941); George Orwell, “James Burnham and the Managerial Revolution,” *New English Weekly*, May, 1946, accessed Aug. 3, 2017, <http://k-1.com/Orwell/site/work/essays/burnham.html>.

apparent from earliest days of US involvement in Vietnam. McNamara examined the war through rational choice theory and systems analysis. His experience during WWII had been as a staff officer in statistical control, and later served as president of Ford Motor Company. McNamara's outlook on geopolitics was simplistic, a feature not desirable given the highly complex Cold War world. He saw the Communist bloc as a "monolith," without regard to the vast differences between Europe and Asia.¹²⁹ McNamara's managerial approach infected the services themselves, as Colonel Hackworth noted in his memoir with the quality of many junior Army officers—trained to be technocratic experts, but far less qualified as combat leaders. Officers with experience in unconventional warfare were often assigned to special operations units rather than regular infantry. Outside of McNamara, the Kennedy and Johnson policy making establishment was deeply motivated by a desire to "giving [the American Dream] a new and grander mission."¹³⁰ From the perspective of the policy luminaries of the time, if American managerialism had triumphed in WWII and made America a superpower under Eisenhower, then it too would work with Vietnam.

US military in the late 1950s and early 1960s influenced the outcome of the American war in Vietnam. Officers who had seen combat in WWII or Korea were thought to have the best expertise for Vietnam by men in-country. Senior leaders back in the US saw the officers with PhDs and technical knowledge as the best the Army had to offer. However, Col. David Hackworth said of one of the latter, "a whiz with a slide rule and a dunce with a side arm, or any other kind of weapon."¹³¹ Neither the "whiz kids" nor the conventional war veterans had

¹²⁹ Douglas Kinnard, *The Secretary of Defense* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1980), 77-78

¹³⁰ David Halberstram, *The Best and the Brightest* (1969; New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), 41.

¹³¹ Col. David H. Hackworth and Eilhys England, *Steel My Soldiers' Hearts: The Hopeless to Hardcore Transformation of the US Army, 4th Battalion, 39th Infantry, Vietnam* (2002; repr., New York: Touchstone, 2003), 2-3.

a clear understanding of what kind of war they were fighting in Vietnam, however. General William C. Westmorland, himself a veteran of the previous conventional wars, understood that American forces were involved in a new type of conflict. Commanders in the field, unfortunately, did not understand that search and destroy alone would not break the Viet Cong operating in South Vietnam.¹³² The officers with the most experience in unconventional warfare were men like Colonel Clyde Russell and Don Blackburn, both of whom headed MACV-SOG (“Studies and Observation Group”) special operations unit. Blackburn had trained and led Filipino guerrillas against the Japanese during WWII.¹³³ These officers, however, were exceptions and assigned to the covert SOG unit. Outside of these exceptional men, the officers in Vietnam lacked either the practice or training to combat revolutionary warfare.

The Cold War ideological battle made the situation in Vietnam more complex and expanded the scope far beyond Southeast Asia. Ho Chi Minh’s political motivation was national liberation, and firm alliance with the Communist world. During WWII the US supported the Vietnamese resistance movement against the Japanese. Ho and other resistance leaders were committed to a socialist Vietnam, while the US wanted another state within their orbit, similar to the Philippines.¹³⁴ During Ho’s time abroad in the 1920s and 30s, he turned to the openly anti-imperialist Communists and worked with the Soviet Comintern.¹³⁵ Ho Chi Minh retained close relations with Stalin, and the Vietnamese Communists were closely aligned with the Soviet Union until 1953. Ho had also been far ahead of Mao

¹³² John M. Carland, “Winning the Vietnam War: Westmorland’s Approach in Two Documents,” *The Journal of Military History* 68, no. 2 (April 2004): 554-555.

¹³³ Schultz, 42, 52.

¹³⁴ Hunt and Levine, *Arc of Empire*, 185-186.

¹³⁵ Hunt and Levine, *Arc of Empire*, 190.

advocating for colonial revolution under the stewardship of a Communist party.¹³⁶ Individual North Vietnamese had a variety of motivations, and tended toward nationalism. They were skeptical of foreign support, the Chinese in particular: “any Vietnamese, no matter what his political color, is highly wary of the Chinese ‘big brother.’”¹³⁷ Supporters of the Viet Cong and the Hanoi regime wanted, as one Vietnamese said, “national reconciliation without reprisals and a policy of non-alignment with...the Americans, the Russians, and the Chinese.”¹³⁸ Several generations of Vietnamese had fought against invaders at the time of the American war; insurgents’ “older brothers, fathers, uncles, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers had fought.”¹³⁹ The North Vietnamese leaders were shrewd at crafting an image: nationalism for their peasant support base, while allying with the Communist world to achieve their ideological objectives. The Sino-Soviet dispute played a role, as the Chinese and Soviets jockeyed for supremacy in their “ongoing world revolution.” The Chinese hoped to draw more countries into their sphere of influence through aid and assistance, particularly Vietnam and Laos.¹⁴⁰ The “limited war” policy of the US establishment was crafted in response to the proxy nature of the war in Vietnam; the Americans did not want to spark a larger conflict.

Vietnamese geography gave the Americans no advantages. The borders were “uncontrollable,” as Bernard Fall wrote in 1954.¹⁴¹ South Vietnam had three major geographic areas: the Mekong Delta at the southernmost point, the Central Highlands, and

¹³⁶ Fall, *Vietnam Witness*, 116-117.

¹³⁷ Fall, *Vietnam Witness*, 20.

¹³⁸ Quoted in Hanson, *Carnage and Culture*, 428.

¹³⁹ Hackworth and England, *Steel My Soldiers' Hearts*, 51.

¹⁴⁰ Xiaoming Zhang, “China’s Involvement in Laos during the Vietnam War, 1963-1975,” *The Journal of Military History* 66, no. 4 (Oct., 2002): 1150.

¹⁴¹ Bernard B. Fall, *Viet-Nam Witness 1953-66* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1966), 17.

then the piedmont of the Annamite Range of mountains.¹⁴² Even with this varied and divided terrain, the population of South Vietnam in the 1960s was about 85 percent ethnic Vietnamese. The remaining 15 percent were ethnic minorities: Dega (the *montagnards*) located in the mountains, Chinese, and Khmers in the Cambodian border area.¹⁴³ American rules of engagement confined them to South Vietnam, at least for conventional military operations. The Viet Cong had not only North and South Vietnam to hide in, but Laos and Cambodia as well. Unlike the Filipino guerrillas, they were not boxed in to one island but could move throughout the Indochina Peninsula to hide and conduct operations from. International diplomacy considerations prevented US forces from directly attacking the Ho Chi Minh Trail that snaked through Laos and Cambodia. The Trail was a vital component of the Vietnamese war effort, evidenced by 25000 troops defending various bases along it. They built up a security method so complex by the fall of 1968 MACV-SOG commanding officer Steve Cavanaugh admitted to not understanding.¹⁴⁴ On a more local level, the Vietnamese had used the terrain to their advantage fighting the French. Before and during the Siege of Dien Bien Phu, French forces had not staunch the supplies leading into the valley leading to defeat, an important lesson that went unlearned during the American war in Vietnam.¹⁴⁵

Vietnam: Not a traditional insurgency

The Vietnam War, despite its appearance, was not a traditional insurgency. In the Philippines, the US confronted a typical guerrilla threat: independent, self-financed insurgents who were often poorly equipped. This was not the case with Vietnam.

¹⁴² Smith et al., *Area Handbook*, 10.

¹⁴³ Smith et al., *Area Handbook*, 12.

¹⁴⁴ Shultz, *Secret War*, 241.

¹⁴⁵ Bernard B. Fall, *Hell in a Very Small Place: The Siege of Dien Phu* (1966; repr., Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002), 451-452.

Counterinsurgency literature of the early 1960s reflected a “romanticized view of people’s wars” that was more true of the Philippine-American War than Vietnam. America’s effort is sometimes compared to the British in Malaya of the 1950s, which again resembled the war in the Philippines. Vietnam, however, was a very different conflict. The United States entered a situation very similar to the later stages of the Chinese Civil War, facing both regular and irregular forces.¹⁴⁶ In the Philippines, the US confronted a weak central opposition army and then bandits in the later stages of the war. In Vietnam, the US had to contend with both the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army, much more sophisticated enemies than the Filipino guerrillas. North Vietnam had state infrastructure, as well as external backing from the Communist world, to support the insurgency in the South.

From the perspective of MACV, the South Vietnamese civilians had to be wrested from the control of the Viet Cong as an external threat. General Westmorland’s 1965 “Theory of Victory” put forth that American forces had to be “carefully controlled at all times,” and that civilian casualties had to be minimized at all costs. Westmorland also recognized that the conflict was both a political and military one. He defined pacification as eliminating the Viet Cong and returning insurgent held areas under the authority of the government of South Vietnam. His strategy required “an extremely high caliber of leadership plus the exercise of judgment and restraint not formerly expected of soldiers.”¹⁴⁷ This strategy, on paper, is remarkably similar to the benevolent assimilation one applied to the Philippine War. The crucial difference, however, was the manpower required to enact did not exist as it did in the early 1900s. The “Boys of ’98” had gone into the Philippines led by Indian War veterans who understood the challenges of counterinsurgency warfare. The

¹⁴⁶ Andrew J. Birtle, *US Army Counterinsurgency Operations Doctrine 1942-1976* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History United States Army, 2006), 361-362.

¹⁴⁷ Carland, “Winning the Vietnam War,” 557-558.

troops of Vietnam generation did not. Further, the diplomatic situation precluded MACV from taking the offensive into Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam in large numbers. Cross border operations were purview of special operations, and limited in scope. The 1965 directives emphasized search and destroy operations against VC base areas and forces.¹⁴⁸ While this was effective on a tactical, engagement to engagement basis, it did not target the overall enemy and source of the insurgency: North Vietnam and the VC infrastructure in the South.

While North Vietnam was the main backer of insurgency in the South, the Viet Cong (officially the National Liberation Front) grew in part because of domestic anger with the South Vietnamese government. Starting in 1957, President Ngo Dinh Diem outraged peasants by redistributing land not to smaller farmers, but large scale landowners. With American aid, he may have been able to court peasant goodwill but failed to do so. Diem's base of support consisted of Catholics who moved to the South after the French withdrawal, and his business partners. From the perspective of disaffected Vietnamese, they had traded one oligarchic government for another.¹⁴⁹ Rural, hamlet dwelling farmers represented the bulk of the population, and those most impacted by decades of war. They were most concerned with the health of their immediate locality, not national level politics.¹⁵⁰ This growing discontent led to the creation in late 1958 what became the Viet Cong. Many of the early members were not members of the Vietnamese Communist Party, but were rather more focused on national liberation as they had against the French. The Communist element,

¹⁴⁸ Carland, "Winning the Vietnam War," 560-561.

¹⁴⁹ Truong Nhu Tang, David Chanoff, and Doan Van Toai, *A Viet Cong Memoir: An Inside Account of the Vietnam War and its Aftermath* (1985; New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 64-65.

¹⁵⁰ Gerald C. Hickey, "Notes on the South Vietnamese Peasant of the Mekong Delta," May 1964, record group 472, box 3, folder 1964, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park.

however, existed within the group from the beginning.¹⁵¹ Diem, a Catholic, alienating the majority Buddhist population was another key blunder strengthening the insurgency.¹⁵² Diem had spent most of his resources on security, and neglected crucial social services needed to make the government legitimate in the eyes of the citizens.¹⁵³ In another failure, he appointed only military officers to rural administrative positions, in areas with which they had little organic connection.¹⁵⁴ With near constant foreign crises elsewhere, the Kennedy administration was not prepared to invest in South Vietnam under Diem, whose mismanagement set the stage for growth in the Viet Cong independent of investment by Hanoi. By late 1963 Henry Cabot Lodge, American ambassador in Saigon, cabled Washington, “there is no possibility...that the war can be won under a Diem administration.”¹⁵⁵ The fall of the loathed Diem had one blessing, as the NLF lost the support of many non-Communist Vietnamese drawn to them.¹⁵⁶ Overall, the government situation in the South created a challenge for the counterinsurgency effort. The US had to back up a government with questionable stability and legitimacy, unlike in the Philippines where the goal was to defeat the insurgency and build up a government in the islands over time.

The insurgency monitored these developments closely. As the “crisis ripened” in 1963 and 1964, the NLF was able to capitalize on it and shore up rural support.¹⁵⁷ The end of the Diem government proved not to be a panacea for stability. From 1964 to February 1965 there was continued political turmoil in Saigon, with new head of MACV, General

¹⁵¹ Tang et al., *Viet Cong Memoir*, 66-68.

¹⁵² Tang et al., *Viet Cong Memoir*, 89.

¹⁵³ Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: The Viking Press, 1983), 233-234.

¹⁵⁴ Karnow, *Vietnam*, 238.

¹⁵⁵ Quoted in Karnow, *Vietnam*, 289.

¹⁵⁶ Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962-1967* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History United States Army, 2006), 121.

¹⁵⁷ Tang et al., *Viet Cong Memoir*, 90-91.

William H. Westmorland slamming the Saigon regime for corruption and inefficiency.¹⁵⁸

While the South Vietnamese government continued to sputter, the Vietnamese Communist Party improved relations with the Soviet Union. They sent a delegation to Moscow in early 1964, in order to unite the socialist states toward “liberation” for South Vietnam.¹⁵⁹ The removal of Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev, who had been reluctant to escalate Soviet involvement, secured the North and the insurgency more assistance and equipment.¹⁶⁰ With the launch of the American ground war in mid-1965, the counterinsurgency effort was at a severe handicap. The South Vietnamese government had alienated its citizens by not providing services and responding to their needs. Since conventional military operations proved inadequate, the United States turned to other solutions.

Without the political will for full scale operations fighting the supply lines of the North in Laos and Cambodia, the US military turned to covert warfare as a possible remedy. Col. Clyde Russell, first head of MACV-SOG, faced severe challenges in his role starting in 1964. SOG’s mission was to take over where the CIA had failed in conducting a secret war in the North. Policy makers in Washington directed Russell to ramp up operations against Hanoi, yet denied him the authority to build a resistance network within North Vietnam. In the same year, the NVA sent a team down the Ho Chi Minh trail to assess the Viet Cong’s capabilities—which resulted in the North escalating its war effort against the South. Yet SOG was not allowed to conduct cross-border operations, giving the insurgency unrestricted ability to build up the Ho Chi Minh Trail.¹⁶¹ All of these restrictions, paradoxically, came after the Kennedy administration set to work developing counterinsurgency and special

¹⁵⁸ Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, 145-147.

¹⁵⁹ Ilya V. Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), 6-7.

¹⁶⁰ Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, 122.

¹⁶¹ Schultz, *Secret War*, 45.

warfare doctrines.¹⁶² Part of this was due to the idea that strategic bombing, not ground level operations, would determine victory or defeat in Vietnam according to policy makers.¹⁶³ The next two years of fighting in South Vietnam would force the US to reassess its approach to counterinsurgency in Vietnam.

Air power was another avenue used by the US to stem infiltration from the North, leading to problems both on the MACV staff and the battlefield. Air Force and Army disputes over air power plagued the MACV staff. The Army dominated MACV, much to Air Force General Curtis LeMay's chagrin. LeMay argued for increased Air Force presence because of the role he thought strategic bombing would play. Army-Air Force tensions were a persistent theme over the course of the war, as the latter resisted expanding the mission of Army armed helicopters.¹⁶⁴ Westmorland was critical of the use of heavy weapons, as he saw the military as a force to protect the civilian population in a predominantly political conflict.¹⁶⁵ Strategic bombing of North Vietnam was another flawed tactic to stem infiltration into the South. While supply lines were damaged greatly, it only increased the flow of Communist troops and materiel.¹⁶⁶ White House advisor Walt Rostow, along with LeMay, pushed for bombing as part of the graduated pressure strategy. Rostow believed damaging a nation's economy by any means was decisive in a conflict, something Maxwell Taylor doubted at the time.¹⁶⁷ President Johnson approved bombing in 1964, but doubted the air war could produce victory. Even in 1965 it was clear that Rolling Thunder had little impact on

¹⁶² Halberstram, *Best and Brightest*, 123-124.

¹⁶³ Halberstram, *Best and Brightest*, 161.

¹⁶⁴ Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 132-134

¹⁶⁵ Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 139-140

¹⁶⁶ May, "Why the United States Won," 373.

¹⁶⁷ David Milne, "'Our Equivalent of Guerrilla Warfare': Walt Rostow and the Bombing of North Vietnam, 1961-1968," *The Journal of Military History* 71, no. 1 (Jan., 2007): 184.

Northern morale or the flow of supplies and men into the South.¹⁶⁸ American air power was critical during the later stages of the war to keep the Saigon regime in power, despite Nixon's grim outlook that bombing of the North alone would not keep the South in power.¹⁶⁹ The air war was a feature of the "Whiz Kid" era, believing that sustained air strikes would force North Vietnamese and NLF capitulation after a certain period of time.

In 1965 American buildup and tactical innovations resulted in the VC and North reassessing their approach to the conflict. Intelligence on the First Cavalry Division raised questions for the North Vietnamese. "How can we fight and win against the cavalry?" Lt. Col. Hoang Phuong questioned in the fall of that year, given that the Viet Cong in the South were foot mobile and at that time poorly equipped.¹⁷⁰ Around the summer months of 1965, following the arrival of the Marines at Danang in March, the character of the NLF changed. The broad coalition of independence fighters with a variety of political orientations became co-opted by cadres from the North, dominating the NLF's leadership. This is what American documents of the time later referred to as the Viet Cong Infrastructure (VCI), the apparatus that mobilized civilian support for and cooperation with, North Vietnam and its assets in the South.¹⁷¹ While the peasants identified more with their hamlet or village than a sense of nationalism, failures of the Saigon government pushed many into support for the insurgency.¹⁷² The Viet Cong's capabilities improved, however, as the Americans continued to send troops and supplies to back up the Saigon government. With assistance from the North, the VC became a professional organization based around its main-force units.

¹⁶⁸ Milne, "Our Equivalent," 187-188.

¹⁶⁹ Karnow, *Vietnam*, 643.

¹⁷⁰ Quoted in Lt. Gen. Hal G. Moore and Joseph L. Galloway, *We Were Soldiers Once...and Young: Ia Drang—the Battle that Changed the War in Vietnam* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), 49.

¹⁷¹ Tang et al., *Viet Cong Memoir*, 103.

¹⁷² Hickey, "Notes,"

The Viet Cong were a highly developed military organization, thanks to support from the North, the broader Communist world, and recruitment of effective troops. They resembled the Chinese revolutionary army in their organization. Main-force regiments had two to four infantry battalions and a heavy weapons battalion. Troops in these units were generally literate, Party members, disciplined, and were highly trained. They were not “the Western caricature” of the part time village or militia units.¹⁷³ Main-force VC was a formidable opponent to American infantry. The “local G” was dangerous, but not to the extent of main-force insurgents.¹⁷⁴ Vo Nguyen Giap ensured that the VC transitioned from a mix of weapons to a standard set based around the Soviet standard 7.62x39mm cartridge. Communist bloc supplies gave the main-force VC modern weapons such as AK-47 assault rifles, Degtyarev machine guns, and rocket propelled grenades, and other weapons systems.¹⁷⁵ Overall, the Viet Cong more closely resembled a conventional army that utilized guerrilla tactics, rather than bands of loose partisans as was the case in the latter stage of the Philippine War.

Search and destroy operations with the objective of inflicting a high body count on the enemy had mixed results from the beginning of the ground war. Brig. Gen. Ellis W. Williamson of the 173rd Airborne criticized “running into the jungle” with often little hard intelligence. The insurgents were able to avoid American troops. Search and destroy conceded the center of gravity to the Viet Cong operating in the South.¹⁷⁶ US operations in Vietnam in 1965 focused on security in and around Saigon. The 1st Infantry Division

¹⁷³ Warren Wilkins, *Grab Their Belts to Fight Them: The Viet Cong's Big-Unit War Against the US, 1965-1966* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2011), 15.

¹⁷⁴ Hackworth and England, *Steel My Soldiers' Hearts*, 52.

¹⁷⁵ 16-17

¹⁷⁶ Quoted in Andrew J. Birtle, *US Army Counterinsurgency Operations Doctrine 1942-1976* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History United States Army, 2006), 374-375.

concentrated north of the city with the objective of grinding down the insurgents' forces. South Vietnamese military and paramilitary units were likewise positioned around the city in the III Corps tactical zone. A number of main-force VC units operated in the region around Saigon.¹⁷⁷ Operation Hump in November 1965 was a case study in early American errors fighting the insurgency. The 173rd Airborne Brigade established an artillery firebase 23 kilometers from Bien Hoa airbase. From November 5-7 the Americans, along with support from the Australians, conducted platoon and company level patrols.¹⁷⁸ Fighting broke out on November 8 between the 173rd and VC, with the Americans carrying the day and achieving a high kill count. The operation ended, and it was deemed a success because of the high amount of casualties inflicted on the enemy. President Johnson and General Westmorland thought repeated high body counts would cause Hanoi to capitulate. Williamson, however, noticed that they had allowed the Viet Cong to pick the time and place of the battle, and stumbled directly into their trap.¹⁷⁹ High body counts did not address the pacification effort, which were to be carried out by the ARVN according to Westmorland's strategy.¹⁸⁰

From 1965 to 1967, operational reports showed a litany of "successes" based on kill counts by infantry and air sorties, with little in the way of American pacification measures. American forces certainly had success based on pure enemy killed, but this was only part of the counterinsurgency effort. Revolutionary development at this stage of the war was still spearheaded by ARVN units. American troops and other allies made up the main battle force to "clear" the area, then moved on for further search and destroy operations. Ideally, the ARVN provided support so that RD teams could build up a village's defenses to where they

¹⁷⁷ John M. Carland, *Stemming the Tide: May 1965 to October 1966* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History United States Army, 2000) 73-75.

¹⁷⁸ Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 76-77.

¹⁷⁹ Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 78-80.

¹⁸⁰ Birtle, *Doctrine 1942-1976*, 366.

could combat the insurgency independently. MACV reported at this time US and allied forces provided “an environment adequate for revolutionary development.” Despite these optimistic indications, the command admitted the insurgency showed “no indications” slowing down, and that enemy attacks became bolder in early 1967. VC hit Saigon on February 13th with a mortar attack, and then a missile barrage against Da Nang airbase on the 27th.¹⁸¹ The US were able to match and quite often exceed the Vietnamese on the battlefield, but were not capable of strategically deterring the overall insurgency. The enemy had been used to confronting much more powerful opponents in a battle of attrition. Reliance on the ARVN for pacification proved to be a liability.

Despite the MACV's desire for the ARVN to take on responsibility in the fighting, they proved to be ineffective. American soldiers loathed their South Vietnamese allies. One American officer called them “the Arabs of Asia.” The United States could not form a unified command with the ARVN for political reasons, as it would give the impression they were truly a puppet army as Communist propaganda alleged. ARVN leadership was criticized by American advisers as poor. Most senior officers had fought for the French, instead of the non-Communist elements of the old Vietminh.¹⁸² In Col. Hackworth's unit, “Almost everyone” hated them. ARVN troops went out on patrol and almost never encountered the enemy, whereas American patrols in the same area of operation made contact with the insurgents. Another member of Hackworth's unit derisively called the South Vietnamese tactics “search and avoid.”¹⁸³ While far better equipped than the insurgency, the

¹⁸¹ GENERAL 1967 MACV MONTHLY SUMMARY for February 1967, 01 February 1967, Folder 01, Box 00, Bud Harton Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. Accessed 20 Oct. 2017, <https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=168300010726>.

¹⁸² Jonathan Randal, “Vietnam's Army,” *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Jun 11, 1967. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/117487692?accountid=28711>.

¹⁸³ Hackworth and England, *Steel My Soldiers' Hearts*, 128.

ARVN's plethora of US supplied hardware "made them complacent." The Viet Cong were able to hit a target and then ambush the ARVN troops that stayed on the roads.¹⁸⁴ US forces in the Philippines did not have to juggle another allied army (that they could not fully command) while fighting Aguinaldo's guerrillas. The poorly motivated and led ARVN were a tremendous weight on both the war and pacification effort in South Vietnam. This lack of pacification effort on the part of the ARVN and MACV prompted the creation of a new office in 1967.

In order to rectify some of the shortcomings of the ground war in combatting the insurgency, the Central Intelligence Agency along with military special operations units instituted the Phoenix Program. Phoenix's objectives were to seek out and neutralize (either by assassination or arrest) VCI operatives in South Vietnam. The program "was an important program that came on the scene much too late."¹⁸⁵ The project was a collaborative effort between multiple American and South Vietnamese agencies, prompted by the lack of countryside pacification apparent by 1967.¹⁸⁶ The 1968 Standard Operating Procedure stressed "close cooperation...must be represented in the sense of community and responsibility."¹⁸⁷ CIA officer Robert Komer helmed Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS), the body that oversaw Phoenix. MACV was unconcerned with civilian pacification—building local political infrastructure and support for the Saigon government—but Komer understood the political component was essential to victory in Vietnam. As deputy in charge of CORDS, he mustered the CIA's assets in South Vietnam.

¹⁸⁴ Karnow, *Vietnam*, 407.

¹⁸⁵ Dale Andrade, *Ashes to Ashes: The Phoenix Program and the Vietnam War* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1990), x.

¹⁸⁶ Andrade, *Ashes to Ashes*, 48.

¹⁸⁷ Phung Hoang SOP No 1, 23 July 1968, record group 472, box 3, folder 1, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.

They were more readily able to target infrastructure, while the military could handle main-force units.¹⁸⁸ After a shaky start in the months after Tet, President Thieu put his support behind Phoenix after seeing the VCI mobilized for the offensive.¹⁸⁹ Overall, the US and South Vietnam were able to neutralize a high number of VCI, dealing a significant blow to the insurgency. In 1969, Phoenix reported over 19000 successful operations, with 60 percent of those counted as “priority targets.”¹⁹⁰ The methods used by the program proved unsavory for a domestic America increasingly alienated from the war effort, however. During Congressional hearings in 1971, Phoenix was targeted as a reason for withdrawal from Vietnam.¹⁹¹

American psychological operations were critical to the counterinsurgency effort, and produced successes. Helicopter loudspeaker flights and leaflet drops encouraged less committed VC to surrender under the Chieu Hoi program. Leaflets and loudspeaker missions also targeted the civilian population, particularly focusing on US and allied military power. One 25th Infantry report in 1966 emphasized that division-level psyops were necessary, as “Wars of Liberation” needed “greater propaganda support than previous wars.”¹⁹² This was especially true in the case of Vietnam. The North’s propaganda solidified their ground troops’ loathe for the United States. The full spectrum dominance of Hanoi’s political machine made American psychological operations against them difficult. Psyops “were forced to use impersonal scraps of paper and radio broadcasts to penetrate the all-

¹⁸⁸ Andrade, *Ashes to Ashes*, 56-57.

¹⁸⁹ Andrade, *Ashes to Ashes*, 82-83.

¹⁹⁰ Phoenix 1969 End of Year Report, 28 February 1970, record group 472, box 3, folder 1, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park MD.

¹⁹¹ Andrade, *Ashes to Ashes*, xv.

¹⁹² ARMY 1966 25th INF-Lessons Learned Jan-Apr 1966, 30 April 1966, Box 00, Bud Harton Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. Accessed 20 Oct. 2017.

encompassing...shield thrown-up around North's population and armed forces."¹⁹³ The Vietnamese Communist Party instilled two ideas in its troops and irregular forces: "revolutionary heroism" and hatred of the United States as an imperialist aggressor.¹⁹⁴ Chieu Hoi was highly effective drawing in the least ideologically motivated VC fighters, with a wartime peak of over 47000 defectors in 1969.¹⁹⁵ There were some much less effective and absurd measures to persuade defectors, such as children's kites with defection slogans, soap bars stamped with propaganda, and leaflets in plastic bags floated up rivers.¹⁹⁶ The benevolent assimilation measures of the Philippines can be seen as a kind of psyop on the civilian population. Unlike North Vietnam, the Army of Liberation lacked the state infrastructure to propagandize Filipinos.

The shock of the Tet Offensive in 1968 was, tactically, an American victory, yet the strategic situation shifted in favor of Hanoi. The "spectacle of war" changed from the rural, guerrilla war to fighting in urban areas.¹⁹⁷ The 1968 offensive was intended to strike urban areas and foment an uprising among the civilian population, given that "the enemy [the US] has not succeeded in dominating the people in the rural areas." Hanoi intended for the military offensive to work in tandem with a "political struggle movement" to achieve revolution in South Vietnam. They targeted youth for recruitment in both political and military wings. Their other slogan to build popular support was "Workers, Peasants and Soldiers Alliance," playing into Leninist rhetoric modified for Vietnam's unique situation. None of these tactics were novel for the North, but merely an extension of their rural

¹⁹³ Robert W. Chandler, *War of Ideas: The U.S. Propaganda Campaign in Vietnam* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1981), 151.

¹⁹⁴ Chandler, *War of Ideas*, 150.

¹⁹⁵ Chandler, *War of Ideas*, 92-93.

¹⁹⁶ Chandler, *War of Ideas*, 90.

¹⁹⁷ Karnow, *Vietnam*, 524-525.

centered strategy from 1965-7.¹⁹⁸ The offensive targeted several key cities and centers of US power, notably Saigon and Hue. The VC, sometimes with PAVN units, fielded at least a battalion for each city assault. Once the initial surprise subsided, American and allied units were able to repulse them in a matter of days.¹⁹⁹ In many cases, the offensive resulted in routs of Communist forces. The 4th Infantry Division and ARVN units cleared Kontum of the enemy and chased the 24th NVA Regiment out of the city. In Pleiku, VC and NVA mistiming prevented them from controlling the city, resulting in another allied victory.²⁰⁰ The attacks on the US embassy in Saigon, Phu Loc, and Danang were countered in less than a day.²⁰¹ Despite these successes, the perception of Tet by Americans at home was the opposite of what had actually occurred.

There were some qualified successes mobilizing South Vietnamese civilians against the Viet Cong after the Tet offensive. Peasants felt alienated by the behavior of both VC combatants and political cadres who came to their cities or villages to fight. They “avoided [the VC] like they did disease” in one case in the Saigon/Cholon area. The insurgents also carried out terror campaigns against GVN personnel, often displaying their corpses on streets as a show of force.²⁰² The actions of the VC While the government’s forces had a checkered record, the hamlet and village level Rural Forces and Popular forces saw improvement during the last years US involvement. The Saigon government responded to requests for weapons,

¹⁹⁸ PRP/NLF in Saigon-1967-1968, 16 November 1969, Folder 01, Box 07, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 01-Assessment and Strategy, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, accessed 24 October 2017. <https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2120701004>

¹⁹⁹ Data on the Tet Offensive—February and March 1968, 05 March 1968, Folder 13, Box 11, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 02—Military Operations, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. Accessed 24 October 2017. <https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2131113057>

²⁰⁰ ARMY 1968 4th Infantry Div. Tet Battles, no date, Folder 1, Box 00, Bud Harton Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, accessed 24 October 2017. <https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=168300010331>

²⁰¹ Data on Tet Offensive—February-March 1968

²⁰² The Viet Cong in Saigon: Tactics and Objectives During the Tet Offensive By Victoria Pohle, 01 January 1969, Folder 12, Box 04, Glenn Helm Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, accessed 24 Oct. 2017. <https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=1070412001>

which dealt a blow to the VC politically and militarily.²⁰³ The Accelerated Pacification Program launched in late 1968, a large scale clear-and-hold operation by the RF/PF had “notable progress...in all areas” during its first 45 days.²⁰⁴ CORDS ensured that villagers displaced by the offensive were housed in refugee centers and given food.²⁰⁵ Army units also conducted humanitarian operations, building schools, wells, toilets, bridges, roads, and other infrastructure. Medical and dental programs were the most popular, with Army personnel administering 27 million treatments from 1965 to 1968. These programs were a stop-gap, however, and had mixed results fully mobilizing the peasants against the Viet Cong. It did not resolve issues within the Saigon government. Villagers still supported the VC despite American benevolence, or did not feel safe supporting the government with lingering threats from the insurgency.²⁰⁶

Cross border operations post-Tet suffered. SOG teams were redeployed to South Vietnam, resulting in fewer raids into the Ho Chi Minh Trail.²⁰⁷ New MACV commander Creighton Abrams received authorization from President Nixon to resume covert bombing in 1969, attempting to occupy the enemy while troops withdrew from Vietnam. After Cambodian Prince Sihanouk was removed from power in March 1970, the joint US-ARVN force crossed the border to destroy insurgent enclaves. The North’s positions were destroyed. The incursion, however, pushed another de-facto protectorate onto the United States. It also caused more domestic troubles for the Nixon administration, inspiring protests and other demonstrations. US forces pulled out of Cambodia on June 30. Even SOG was unauthorized

²⁰³ “MACCORDS Fact Sheet, Subject: People’s Self Defense,” 21 February 1969, record group 472, box 4, folder II, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park.

²⁰⁴ MACCORDS FACT SHEET subj. Accelerated Pacification Program, 17 December 1968, Pacification Program/Fact Sheets, Folder I, Record Group 472-Headquarters MACV Office of CORDS General Records, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.

²⁰⁵ Andrade, *Ashes to Ashes*, 74.

²⁰⁶ Birtle, *Doctrine 1942-1976*, 396-398.

²⁰⁷ Schultz, *Secret War*, 246-247.

to conduct American led missions.²⁰⁸ Despite positive intentions, the Incursion only served to increase dissatisfaction with the war back in the US. Policy makers turned to a new solution of giving the South full control of the fighting while the United States negotiated with the North to end the war.

Vietnamization, along with new leadership, “changed the basic structure of the war,” giving American leadership and the public an end to what they saw as a questionable war.²⁰⁹ Creighton Abrams became new head of MACV and William Colby succeeded Komer at CORDS. Along with Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, they attempted to focus on nation building and modernization in South Vietnam, rather than emphasize security. The Saigon leadership, however, cut spending to key programs. Some historians speculate that greater modernization and development may have given the US and South Vietnam victory.²¹⁰ In July 1969, Vietnamization was instituted to lower American casualties and cover the pullout of troops, while keeping pressure on North Vietnam. Both President Nixon and generals during the war saw the project as a success. Despite the constant political instability and poor record of the ARVN, one Rand Corporation report alleged that the US had made the Saigon government stable through Vietnamization.²¹¹ The anti-war left decried the effort, citing that America became involved in the war after a decade of advisory to Saigon. In their view, the US would only be “changing the color of the corpses.”²¹² The new strategy subsumed all warfighting efforts into the ARVN, a reversal of the “two war” policy of the years prior.²¹³ In

²⁰⁸ Schultz, *Secret War*, 257-258.

²⁰⁹ Scott Sigmund Gartner, “Differing Evaluations of Vietnamization,” *The Journal of Military History* 29, no. 2 (Autumn 1998): 243-244.

²¹⁰ Fisher, “Nation Building,” 454.

²¹¹ Gartner, “Evaluations of Vietnamization,” 245-246.

²¹² Eugene J. McCarthy, “Topics: The Failure of Vietnamization by any Name.” *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Aug 01, 1970. <https://search-proquest-com.proxy-su.researchport.umd.edu/docview/117998848?accountid=28711>.

²¹³ Gartner, “Evaluations of Vietnamization,” 250.

practice, Vietnamization helped the Saigon government hang on for a few more years. What they needed to win is a subject for counterfactual analysis.²¹⁴ The earlier problems of the ARVN persisted during American withdrawal. They were still easily beaten by the Communists and units were drained en masse from desertion.²¹⁵ Ultimately, Vietnamization was a screen for American withdrawal so that Nixon could deliver on his campaign promises. The success of the drawdown helped him win reelection in 1972. While a positive development for Americans tired of the war, it hastened the end of South Vietnam. The Saigon government had grown to rely on American forces for their security and funding, and building up South Vietnam's national military was a failure.

American efforts in South Vietnam produced tactical successes. Troops were able to win battles against main-force Viet Cong and NVA. The Phoenix Program and pacification work by CORDS assisted many South Vietnamese, and the aftermath of Tet turned many peasants against the insurgency. The overall strategy of the war, however, lacked focus; the North was more than willing to play into a strategy of attrition. American leadership believed they could win through their strategies of "limited war" and "graduated pressure." Domestic unrest over intervention was another crippling factor, in sharp contrast to the Philippine War.

Conclusions

The Philippine-American War and Vietnam conflicts display some similarities, but close analysis and comparison between the two demonstrates the problems that arise when characterizing "insurgency" as always displaying the same characteristics. Fourth generation warfare literature often takes a one size fits all approach to conflicts, measuring them against

²¹⁴ Gartner, "Evaluations of Vietnamization," 260.

²¹⁵ Craig R. Whitney, Special to The New York Times. "ALLIED PROGRAM FAILS A KEY TEST." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, May 02, 1972. <https://search-proquest-com.proxy-su.researchport.umd.edu/docview/119435677?accountid=28711>.

pre-established axioms or ideas that can often clash with reality, such as Colonel Hammes' book referenced at the beginning of this paper. Vietnam was in reality a civil war between two state-level actors, the United States and North Vietnam, while the Philippines was a more "classic" anti-guerrilla operation.

US forces in the Philippines had a number of advantages both institutionally and on the battlefield. Aguinaldo did not have the sophisticated state style political and military infrastructure that Ho Chi Minh had developed over several decades. Ethnic divisions compounded the lack of Filipino centralization, as Aguinaldo's base of support came primarily from Luzon, not from the archipelago as a whole. This fracturing severely limited the Army of Liberation as a robust guerrilla army, especially against US forces led by veterans of irregular wars and armed with modern weaponry. Circumstances had prohibited Aguinaldo from staying in the Philippines long enough to build up a broader coalition of support, as he had been fighting against the Spanish prior to US involvement in the islands. US forces also had significant domestic political support for the war effort, with expansionist Progressives determining foreign policy rather than isolationist Democrats. The Americans had far more political will to win the war than their guerrilla opponents did, as illustrated by the breakdown in Filipino cohesion after the assassination of General Luna. The US was still able to maintain a war effort despite intense debate in both the media and Congress over the conduct of the war, and did not have to cope with as ethnically fractured a population for its army. Class considerations also played a role in the shaping the Filipino guerrillas; Aguinaldo and the other insurgent commanders were from the middle class, and often did not inspire the lower classes to revolt against the Americans. US efforts at benevolent assimilation further undercut possible support for the guerrillas from the civilian population.

Unlike the Philippines, Vietnam was a far more complex situation made worse by international Cold War pressures and the presence of mass media. The United States had been unprepared for full commitment and opted for a strategy of limited war that proved to be misguided. The graduated pressure idea was further compounded by the weakness and instability in the Saigon government and its forces, which was a ball and chain on American combat operations and pacification. The US had established a direct colonial style government in the Philippines and did not have to deal with an existing native regime, but this would have been politically impossible in the 1960s. The Americans appeared to turn the tide after the Tet Offensive: the Viet Cong had been largely eliminated as a significant battlefield threat, VCI neutralizations reached record highs, and the rural population began to turn against the guerrillas. Political will to win the war, however, was in the hands of the North Vietnamese. Americans at home were confused by the aims of the conflict by 1968, and media portrayals of the Tet campaigns led to a perception of defeat that did not exist in reality. Much like the 1900 election had been a referendum in favor of the Philippine War, President Nixon's victory in 1968 demonstrated that Americans were tired of waiting for a promised victory that never arrived. Expanding the ground war effort into Cambodia or North Vietnam may have given South Vietnam more time, but the US lacked the popular political support for a total war effort against the North. The possibility of intervention by China or the Soviet Union in a more overt role also limited options for US policy makers. Vietnam was a civil war that the US intervened in without the proper strategy, and sided with the weaker state.

Lessons learned from the Philippines could not have been so neatly applied to Vietnam, or vice versa. American policy makers had radically different worldviews in the

two different eras, and Vietnam was further complicated by Cold War geopolitics.

Comparison of these two interventions demonstrates that asymmetrical conflicts must be approached with greater nuance, rather than examining these kinds of conflicts based on a common template or model. The US has only faced more insurgent threats since the end of the Vietnam War, with no clear end in sight. Future US policy must take a more detailed approach to examining past guerrilla conflicts and understand the distinction between pure counter-insurgency and civil war intervention. The Viet Cong's military professionalism and state level backing constituted an entirely different kind of threat than the poorly disciplined, decentralized Filipino fighting bands. Ultimately, the US prevailed in the Philippines because of their weak enemy and military superiority, while facing defeat in Vietnam because of poor strategy and political complications.