

JOHN M. GATES, THE U.S. ARMY AND IRREGULAR WARFARE, CHAPTER FIVE

THE PHILIPPINES AND VIETNAM

From 1964 to 1967 the contrasts between the war in Vietnam and the army's campaign in the Philippines were vivid and repeatedly before me as I left my research in the Duke library for a look at the evening television news. Each day, after reading about the army's successful work in the Philippines, I could not avoid comparing the campaign I was studying with the one that I was watching on TV. As my knowledge of the war in Vietnam increased, the striking differences between the two conflicts became more evident and, given the horrifying results of what I was seeing in Vietnam, more distressing.

My first attempt to formalize my perceptions came in 1971, motivated by my reading of two articles that seemed thoroughly wrong-headed when viewed from the perspective of my knowledge of the two campaigns. Not surprising, given the heightened emotional atmosphere of the war, attempts to get my analysis published proved frustrating. I have already characterized in this book's introduction the way in which the biases of both anti and pro-war referees and editors guided their evaluation of my manuscript. I was more than grateful when my work finally gained acceptance at *Asian Studies*, a journal published by the Asian Center of the University of the Philippines, and was printed in the April 1972 issue (which appeared in mid-1973) as "The Philippines and Vietnam: Another False Analogy."

In the intervening years, I have changed my view of the two wars on a number of points, but I have not abandoned my basic conclusion that more is to be learned from contrasting the conflicts than from facile comparisons of the kind that initially motivated me to write on the topic. In 1982 I presented a revised version of my original paper as a lecture entitled "The American Experience of Guerrilla War" at the Center of Military History in Washington, D. C., and I undertook further revisions for a presentation entitled "Two American Confrontations with Asian Nationalism: The Pacification of the Philippines and the Destruction of Vietnam" in the "Perspectives in Military History" series at the Army's Military History Institute in 1985. The version of the paper printed here was given as one of my 1986 lectures at Obirin College.

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Americans seem to have an almost perverse attachment to argument from analogy, and the mystical power and persuasiveness of that particular form of argumentation can be immense. The image of falling dominoes was all too prevalent, for example, during the long debate over United States involvement in Vietnam, and as the historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., observed, "the multitude of errors committed in the name of 'Munich' may exceed the original error of 1938."^[1] In the early 1970s, in the wake of the tragedy of My Lai and the trial of Lieutenant William Calley, a new analogy caught hold of the minds of many people opposing the Indochina War. What might be termed the Philippine analogy became the subject of both extended commentaries and passing references, particularly to the court martial of General Jake Smith in 1902.

The temptation to stress the similarities between the Philippine campaign and the war in Vietnam was great. The existence of a vocal opposition to both wars, the considerable publicity given to war crimes and atrocities, the evidence of American racism in the face of an Asian enemy, and many other parallels made the task a relatively easy one, leading some people to make incredible claims on behalf of the analogy. One author, for example, was bold enough to state that "rarely do historical events resemble each other as closely as the involvements of the United States in the Philippines in 1899 and Vietnam in 1964."^[2] Another author found "the similarities between the two wars . . . eerily striking."^[3]

During the Vietnam War, articles with such titles as "Our MyLai of 1900" and "The First Vietnam" presented a replay of earlier anti-imperialist criticism, with references to the army's "policy of terror" or its "standard extermination policies."^[4] One author even claimed that "in some applications" the American approach to pacification was "genocidal."^[5] The author of an article entitled "MyLai Was Not the First Time" concluded, with help from a statement by a leading anti-imperialist, that "the ultimate responsibility . . . lay with the highest authority of all, 'the people of the United States.'"^[6] The message of all the unscholarly and polemical writing was the same: not only were the two wars very similar, but the United States military had behaved atrociously in both of them. That conclusion gained considerable acceptance.

In a typical presentation of the Philippine analogy the basic argument is that the American army waged an incredibly brutal campaign against the Filipino revolutionaries between 1899 and 1902 in the face of enlightened opposition to the war by anti-imperialists at home. Usually authors emphasized the unfeeling and atrocious acts of individual American soldiers, the brutality and destructive nature of the conflict, the merit and value of the anti-imperialist opposition, and, finally, the attempts of the administration to justify its actions and bury evidence of American war crimes. Parallels to the Indochina conflict are made both explicitly and by implication.

Although arguments from analogy can be quite valuable, they do have many pitfalls. An event can easily become distorted in the process of demonstrating its similarity to a supposedly analogous happening. Perhaps even more significant in terms of the long run consequences, in arguments by analogy the similarities, even if real, may obscure more important dimensions of the phenomenon under study that do not fit into the analogy. Rather than increasing one's understanding, arguments from analogy may actually obscure important lessons to be learned from current mistakes. The Philippine analogy suffers from all of these failings.

Most commentaries comparing the American experiences in the Philippines and Vietnam are only partially correct in their overall assessment of the earlier campaign; invariably they contain important oversights that significantly alter the picture of American actions in the islands. In fact, most interpretations are inaccurate enough to make the Philippine analogy they present of questionable value at best. For example, the portraits usually painted of the American military commanders in the Philippines are uncomplimentary in the extreme and, as a result, hide much of the astute leadership given to the army's pacification efforts in the archipelago. General E. S. Otis, commanding the United States troops during the first year of the Filipino-American War, is commonly shown as an indecisive and overly optimistic antique unfit for command. In the early stages of the war, however, General Otis was almost alone among high ranking officers in seeing the true nature of the conflict that had developed. He realized that the basic issue was not military but political. He therefore stressed reform over military action and worked to increase American troop strength in the islands before embarking on campaigns to destroy the revolutionary army.^[7] The officers who criticized Otis's caution and counseled immediate offensive action against the Filipino army were certainly decisive in their intent, but they were even more optimistic than Otis in their assumption that such rash activity by an American force of some 26,000 men could bring an end to the war.

Purveyors of the Philippine analogy like to cite the dramatic statements of officers such as Captain John H. Parker to the effect that "the fundamental obstruction to complete pacification" was "the attempt to meet a half-civilized foe . . . with the same methods devised for civilized warfare against people of our own race, country and blood."^[8] Of greater significance, however, was the policy of enlightened military government and campaigning that provoked such statements. Many American officers were committed to what their revolutionary enemies identified as a "policy of attraction," the attempt to gain Filipino support by acts of mercy and reform rather than through the use of unbridled military force. This policy, begun under General Otis, emphasized the development of schools, municipal governments, public health facilities, and public works projects. General Arthur MacArthur, who replaced Otis in May 1900, was as committed to the benevolent policy as his

predecessor, convinced that severity in the treatment of Filipinos would only work "to impede the policy of the United States and to defeat the very purpose which the army is here to accomplish."[\[9\]](#)

Although obscured by hundreds of pages of anti-imperialist propaganda, cooptation and not brutality was the cornerstone of American military policy in the Philippines. The Philippine revolutionaries saw that at the time, and they resorted to widespread terrorism against their own people in an attempt to prevent them from accepting American rule. As one Filipino guerrilla leader observed, "continuous contact with our enemies may cause the gravest damage to our sacred cause" owing, in his estimation, to the American "policy of attraction."[\[10\]](#) Significantly, captured Filipino revolutionary documents contained many more references to problems caused by American benevolence than references to American brutality. One must turn to anti-imperialist propaganda and current recitations of the Philippine analogy to find the latter. Clearly, atrocities did happen, but they have been greatly exaggerated. The significant feature of American action and policy in the Philippines was not brutality but the reform orientation of the army's commanders that enabled them to end the conflict in a relatively short time using an approach in which co-option was more important than coercion.

The so-called "extreme measures" begun in December 1900 should not be equated with the shocking atrocities usually associated with the Philippine campaign. One of the "harsher" methods, for example, was the incarceration of captured revolutionaries. Prior to the end of 1900, most guerrillas taken prisoner had been disarmed and released as part of the benevolent policy. The trial of terrorists as war criminals, a perfectly legal process under the military laws of the day, was also one of the new "extreme measures." Although certainly a more questionable move, the policy of population reconcentration, used primarily in regions where recalcitrant revolutionaries refused to surrender even after it was obvious that their cause was lost, was neither illegal nor unprecedented (Americans had used it during the Civil War). Contrary to the view prevailing in most accounts, General MacArthur consistently rejected the recommendations of some of his subordinates for the adoption of a highly repressive policy. As noted earlier, William Howard Taft, head of the civilian Philippine Commission, advocated a harsher policy than that developed by MacArthur, and Taft supported the view that with McKinley's re-election "the time will have come to change our lenient policy."[\[11\]](#)

Statements of the Philippine analogy invariably present General "Howling Jake" Smith as a typical example of American military leadership and brutality, although in fact he was clearly an anomaly. Smith's Samar campaign was inept, consisting primarily of futile search-and-destroy missions. In 1902, the same year that Smith's forces were devastating much of the sparsely-inhabited interior of Samar, a more typical example of American campaigning at its harshest was taking place in Batangas Province under the direction of General J. F. Bell. Bell's Batangas campaign contained its share of atrocities, particularly after Bell resorted to population reconcentration and a scorched earth policy to deny the guerrillas the supplies they needed to exist, and Bell was criticized harshly for his actions, both by anti-imperialists at the time and by others later. Bell's campaign in Batangas, however, was not really comparable to that of Smith on Samar. Bell worked much harder than Smith to maintain control over his men and to provide for the welfare of the reconcentrated Filipino population under his supervision.[\[12\]](#) Of equal significance, the campaigns of both Smith and Bell took place at a time when the revolution had all but ended and under the overall direction of General Adna R. Chaffee, who had replaced MacArthur in 1901. Chaffee seemed to lack the perceptiveness and the commitment to the "policy of attraction" of his predecessor, and it was Chaffee who made the comment that the only way to achieve peace was to pin down the Filipinos "with bayonets for ten years until they submit,"[\[13\]](#) a statement usually attributed erroneously to MacArthur. Fortunately, many of the American officers in the Philippines retained their belief that reform was the road to peace. Bell, for example, had made it quite clear that he was not advocating torture, burning, or other unauthorized severities when he instructed his men to be "firm and relentless in action."[\[14\]](#)

One should not end a discussion of the Philippine analogy without a comment on its picture of the anti-imperialist movement. The anti-imperialists were a courageous and sincerely motivated group; the questions they raised provided a valid challenge to their more imperialistically minded countrymen. But to call the anti-imperialists "antiwar radicals," as did one author,^[15] conveys an inaccurate picture of that early peace movement. In reality the majority of anti-imperialist leaders constituted an old, backward-looking and politically ineffective minority that was localized primarily in New England. Elitists like Edward Atkinson, Andrew Carnegie, E. L. Godkin, Charles Eliot Norton, and Carl Schurz made up an important segment of the movement, and the anti-imperialist leagues contained some of the most conservative men in America. Although a current of racism and a belief in Anglo-Saxon superiority was present in American imperialism, that same stream ran through the anti-imperialist movement as well. In fact, some Southern Congressmen had opposed annexation of Spanish territories because of their desire to prevent the incorporation of more dark-skinned people into the American nation. To call such people radicals is a significant error, and to compare them even implicitly to the more forward-looking and relatively more effective members of the Vietnam era anti-war movement is misleading to say the least.

The foregoing revision of the traditional picture of American operations in the Philippines can easily be misinterpreted. The argument that the American campaign was not unduly brutal is not an apology for the imperialistic policies that provoked the conflict or the war crimes committed by Americans during the course of the war. Even more important, it is definitely not an attack on the motives of authors who, in a sincere effort to make Americans reassess the conflict in Indochina, presented the Philippine analogy to the public. Atrocities of war and American attitudes toward other peoples are an important topic for discussion, and the Philippine analogy highlights them both, but no matter how laudable the intentions of its adherents might be, the analogy itself remains fatally flawed.

Vietnam was not the Philippines, and the significant differences between the two wars should make one wary of facile comparisons. The Philippine revolutionaries had neither a place of sanctuary, free from American attack, nor material aid from the outside. Unlike the war in Indochina, the Philippine conflict did not take place in a tense international context where a small war might well be the prelude to a larger and much more disastrous one. Furthermore, it was not being fought in the shadow of nuclear arms or in the context of an ideologically and emotionally charged cold war. Whereas American leaders in Indochina were compelled to cooperate with indigenous governments that frequently proved to be frustrating beyond belief, their counterparts in the Philippines had tremendous freedom of action. They were the government.

Even the protests against the war were different. The anti-imperialists were never as numerically strong or as able to capture the attention of the nation as the people who protested against the war in Vietnam. More important, however, were the differences in the composition of the two groups. Many anti-imperialist leaders represented an older generation, and people such as Grover Cleveland, William Jennings Bryan, E. L. Godkin, or Carl Schurz would play an increasingly minor role as their powerful, industrial nation moved into the twentieth century. In contrast, the anti-war protest of the 1960s and 1970s was fueled by young people whose experiences and ideas would live on to influence subsequent policy. The anti-imperialists were an active minority, but unlike their later counterparts, they were also an insignificant one.

There are some equally striking differences between the Americans who fought the two wars. The men in the Philippines were volunteers; many of those in Vietnam were unwilling conscripts. More important, however, were the differences between the officers involved. At the turn of the century, the army's officer corps was not representative of American society but of its elite, a self-assured group with a self-conscious progressive orientation and a commitment to such traditional values as "Duty--Honor--Country." In Vietnam the officer corps represented a much more diverse cross section of the American nation. Many officers seemed to lack the self-assurance and the self-conscious progressivism of their earlier counterparts, and officers themselves have observed that a

commitment to career advancement frequently outweighed that to other values. Finally, but certainly not least important, officers often remained on duty in the Philippines for the duration. There was no revolving door or ticket punching to contend with. In 1902, the U. S. Army in the Philippines had three years of experience in fighting Philippine guerrillas, not one year of experience three times over.

The contrast in the enemy ranks was also significant. The Filipino independence movement, coming at the end of the nineteenth century, was much less sophisticated in its organization and revolutionary technique than the forces of the Vietminh. Not only were the Vietnamese revolutionaries more experienced, as a result of their long war with the French, but they also had a firmly established national base in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. They were also the beneficiaries of a half-century of anti-imperialist and revolutionary struggle in which the Filipinos had played the role of precursor and Mao Zedong that of mentor.

A final contrast, of great importance, is the vast technological difference between the two wars, apparent not only in the weapons used, but in virtually every other dimension of the two conflicts, from communications to medical care. It seems almost absurd to compare the operations of fewer than 70,000 American troops in an archipelago of some 8,000,000 people with the work of approximately a million troops, if one includes South Vietnamese forces, in an area with a population of about 18,000,000. The absurdity becomes particularly vivid when one thinks about the weapons available to each group. The rifle and the match of 1899 can hardly be equated with the helicopter gunships, B-52s, and napalm bombs of the 1960s. For that reason alone attempts to compare rather than contrast the two campaigns have been of little value.

By stressing the atrocities committed in the Philippines, authors have concluded that revolutionary warfare is inherently atrocious, a struggle in which brute force plays the most important role. If anything, however, the Philippine experience, when contrasted with that in Vietnam, demonstrates the exact opposite conclusion. American soldiers destroyed the Filipino revolution because of their careful stress on the political dimensions of the conflict, and traditional military action or combat played a secondary role in their American success.

In Vietnam, however, despite the development of a theory of counterinsurgency in the early 1960s which stressed civic action and other political approaches, conventional military activity often predominated, and the lack of results frustrated military and political leaders alike. The highly sophisticated tools of modern war proved ill-suited to the tasks of revolutionary warfare and nation building.

The devastating results of the use of massive firepower, including the generation of hundreds of thousands of refugees, created a situation in which political solutions, including the implementation of reform, became increasingly difficult. Building schools, clinics, and roads in the midst of the destruction and turmoil present in Vietnam in the late 1960s had little value as tools of pacification. Instead, pacification was frequently no more than a sideshow to the destructive firepower displays that were a part of daily life in the Indochinese countryside.

When TV news transmitted the images of the war into American living rooms, many Americans were appalled by what they saw, and numerous reports confirmed their worst suspicions concerning the negative and destructive effects of American and South Vietnamese firepower. Unfortunately, by focusing on specific war crimes, and calling for an end to the draft and the withdrawal of American ground forces from Vietnam, war protesters often obscured the important problems caused by the use of weapons of mass destruction. The counterproductive role of such weapons in revolutionary war remains a subtle but extremely significant issue.

A more balanced view of the American campaign in the Philippines should lead to conclusions that are far different from those stressed by most adherents to the Philippine analogy. First, although the claim that "MyLai Was Not the First Time" is obviously correct, the implication that that is the

significant thing to be learned from a comparison of the American intervention in the Philippines with the war in Vietnam is not. As long as war exists there will be atrocities, and one certainly does not need to look at either the American Philippine or Vietnam experience to learn that war is horrible or that politicians and military men will do all that they can to hide their errors and to override criticism of their actions. That is apparent enough in the study of virtually any war. Second, by focusing on the atrocities committed in the Philippines and by stressing the numerous points of commonality between the American experience there and in Vietnam, authors have done much to obscure the nature of both conflicts. Why, one wonders, must the United States need to have been atrocious in the Philippines to enable Americans to understand the war in Vietnam?

If anything, the Philippine experience probably teaches a lesson exactly the opposite from the one that is usually presented. American soldiers repressed the Filipino revolution because of their careful stress on the political dimension of the conflict and their implementation of a variety of reforms, not because of traditional military action or combat. The conscious efforts of military leaders to prevent My Lai's were much more significant than the occurrence of atrocities in opposition to the stated policy. Revolutionary wars are political conflicts. Americans realized that in the Philippines and acted accordingly. In Vietnam, although the counter-insurgency theory of the early 1960s recognized the importance of civic action, more conventional military activity became the primary point of focus, and the lack of results frustrated military and political leaders alike. Thus, if one uses the Philippine analogy at all, experience seems to indicate that part of the failure in Vietnam came because the Americans fighting the Indochina war did things so differently from what their counterparts had done more than a half century before.

With the widespread destruction of Indochinese society and the region's environment, the time soon passed in which the Philippine experience could provide useful lessons for would-be counterinsurgents fighting in Vietnam. By the mid 1960s bombs, anti-personnel weapons, defoliants, inflation, the displacement of thousands of villagers, and a host of other horrors moved the situation in Vietnam too far away from what it was in the early sixties to make a political solution of the problem, even through reform, a realistic option. Consequently, one clear lesson of any comparative study should be that one could not reproduce the Philippines of 1900 or 1901 in the Indochina of the 1960s or 70s. The situations, for all their apparent similarity, are just not analogous.

General James L. Collins, Jr., has been quoted as saying that, "had we had an organized body of literature" dealing with the Philippine campaign, "we would have saved ourselves a good deal of time and effort in Vietnam." General Bruce Palmer, Jr. made a similar comment in 1989, saying "I wish that when I was the deputy chief of staff for operations at Department of the Army in 1964-1965, we had studied the US Army's campaigns in the Philippines during the insurrection." They may be correct, but one suspects that the availability of such a history would have made little difference, for it would have told Americans no more about successful counterinsurgency campaigning than the literature already available in the writings of the 1950s and 1960s. Palmer claimed that a 1988 article about the Philippine war in *Military Review* "would have been of tremendous help to us in sorting out our thoughts [on the situation in Vietnam]." [16] Palmer apparently had no knowledge of an excellent 1964 article on the war, also printed in *Military Review*. [17]

The American problem in Vietnam was not a lack of information, historical or otherwise; it was the frequent failure to act upon the sound information, useful ideas, and valid suggestions that were readily available. A detailed and candid study of the French experience in Indochina seems to have been totally ignored, for example. [18] One suspects that nothing one might have written in the mid-1960s about the earlier war in the Philippines or the ongoing war in Vietnam would have convinced U. S. Army leaders of the importance of the non-military aspects of irregular warfare and the counterproductive effects of the use of massive firepower. People in high places rarely listen to what they do not want to hear.

In Vietnam, the United States fought the war poorly and lost; that is perhaps the greatest and most important contrast of all between the two wars. Unfortunately, the publications that have compared the two wars tend more to obscure than to highlight the reasons for the American failure.

Attempts to demonstrate that the United States was as inept in the Philippines as it was in Indochina have achieved little. More understanding can be gained from an approach that emphasizes the new and unique dimensions of the Vietnam War, for the horror seen there was caused to a large extent by conditions growing out of the current state of the art of war and not, as the purveyors of the Philippine analogy would have one believe, out of some racist or imperialist stream running deep in the American past.

The dimensions of the Indochina conflict that many people found most abhorrent--the death and mutilation of thousands of noncombatants, the terror, the destruction of the environment, and the disintegration of the societies involved--were the direct result of the use of modern weaponry having massive destructive capability but lacking effectiveness and decisiveness when used in the type of conflict waged in Indochina.

The contrast between the Philippine experience and the Indochina War highlights significant problems facing any American leader contemplating the use of military force. First, the destructive capability of modern weapons is so great that *war in which a great power uses the latest weaponry that its technology can provide is no longer a legitimate or useful extension of national policy*. For over a decade military strategists have recognized that nuclear war is not a feasible policy option, but the Vietnam experience demonstrated that other forms of war may be impossible for states with the resources and weaponry of the United States. The use of fire and air power was a direct and major cause of the destruction, mutilation, and death that many Americans deplored in Vietnam and the rest of Indochina. The majority of the refugees fleeing to the cities were not running from either Viet Cong terrorism or the horror of a MyLai. Their displacement had been caused by the indiscriminate use of weapons of unimaginable destructive capability. American air power and artillery caused the major share of civilian casualties and did the greatest amount of damage to the environment. The people and government of the United States were responsible for the devastating use of air and fire power, and the withdrawal of American combat troops from Vietnam did little to end it. In fact, the fewer troops the United States placed in the zone of conflict, the more it came to rely upon massive fire and air power to keep the balance of force in the hands of the government of South Vietnam.

The destructive techniques of military force have been perfected considerably since the turn of the century, but their ability to be truly decisive when used seems to have declined. The development of air power is a case in point. World War II showed that strategic bombing was not capable of the achievements that Giulio Douhet and other theorists attributed to it. Bombing could not easily destroy the war-making capacity of a belligerent (the peak of German war production came in mid-1944), or the enemy's will to fight. The war in Korea showed that the supply line of an army that depended primarily on human beings as prime movers could not be interdicted successfully through the use of air power alone. Both of these experiences were repeated in the course of the conflict in Indochina, yet many American military officers continued to adhere to a doctrine that should have been repudiated by their own experience. Bombing and firepower can kill, but they cannot convince. They can make war more destructive than anything that people have heretofore imagined, but they cannot make war a more effective tool of policy. That fact seems to have been understood clearly by Americans in the Philippines, and their stress on reform and other political factors gave a more proper guide to their military activities. The United States did not pursue a similarly enlightened policy of imperialism in Vietnam.

A second lesson of the Philippine-Indochina comparison stems directly from the first. If firepower intensive warfare has become so destructive that it is no longer an acceptable instrument of policy, then *intervention in any situation where such warfare is a probable outcome has also lost its*

utility. In its direct impact on the people involved, the war in Indochina was a far cry from that in the Philippines. The outcome of the Indochina War indicates that the great nation relying on its massive firepower and modern weapons technology may no longer have the ability to protect its allies from either internal or external subversion, and it certainly cannot intervene successfully in the domestic affairs of another nation against any sizable opposition. It does, however, have the capacity to destroy nations and peoples in the name of protecting them. As Daniel Ellsberg observed, a national leader would be committing "an act of treachery against his society" if he called for American aid in a conflict that he knew would be long and would entail a large American military commitment.^[19]

A comparison of the war in the Philippines with that in Vietnam also highlights the conclusion that revolution has changed over time. At one point, such as the late-eighteenth century, the preponderance of power seemed to lie with the revolutionaries, at another point, such as the mid-19th century, the preponderance of power tilted toward the counterrevolutionaries. With the passage of time, revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries perfected their technique, learning from past experience, developing new approaches and theories, and taking advantage of new forms of technology.

In the Philippines, at the start of the twentieth century, the forces of counterrevolution, represented by the American army, held the upper hand. In Vietnam, however, a very different situation existed. By the middle of the twentieth century both revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries had found ways to achieve their goals against a weak or unprepared adversary and, with effort, to stalemate a more determined one. The result has been an era of frustration for revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries alike. With well prepared and determined adversaries on both sides, the costs of revolution and counterrevolution are so high that only people who do not consider cost when assessing victory can look upon either goal as particularly desirable. In such a context, accommodation may be the wisest choice, as it would have been in Vietnam for either the United States or the Communist revolutionaries of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

At the end of the nineteenth century, war could be a relatively useful tool for accomplishing the goals of national policy, although in retrospect one may regret both the imperial policy being pursued by the United States in the Philippines and the price paid by the Filipino people who resisted it. Nevertheless, good or bad, the policy could be furthered by military means, providing, of course, that one's military leaders went about their assigned tasks in an enlightened way. That is exactly what happened at the turn of the century, and the results were decisive. The Philippine revolution was crushed; the American hold over the island was secured; and the vocal anti-imperialist minority in the United States was overwhelmed, all with considerably less destruction, death, and agony than was evident during the Indochina conflict.

In the years between the end of the war in the Philippines and the involvement of American forces in Vietnam, war changed significantly, and one of the most obvious changes took place in the destructive capability of weapons. Unfortunately, the ability of military forces to use their new weapons decisively did not keep pace with the growth in destructiveness. In Indochina, despite the employment of highly technological weapon systems that were beyond the imagination of the old army's soldiers, Americans failed to achieve their goals. A similar lack of decision has been seen elsewhere: in the Middle East, Afghanistan, Central America. Eventually even stalemated wars end, but only after prolonged periods of strife and destruction. Many wars also end without solving the problems that led to them or establishing a lasting peace.

In *Arms and Men*, Walter Millis observed that where "Polk or McKinley could use war as an instrument of politics or policy," by the time of World War II, war had become "a naked instrument of defense, of defense alone and of defense only in an extremity of crisis." With the development of nuclear explosives, said Millis, "its utility even to this end was questionable."^[20] Since the publication of *Arms and Men* in 1956, the situation would seem to have become worse rather than better.

In a look at American military history from the other side of the Vietnam watershed, Russell Weigley reached a conclusion similar to that of Millis. After noting that "at no point on the spectrum of violence does the use of combat offer much promise for the United States today," Weigley ended *The American Way of War* with the observation that "the history of usable combat may at last be reaching its end."[\[21\]](#)

Although such conclusions have yet to gain widespread acceptance, a comparison of the American military effort in the Philippines with that in Vietnam seems to support such a view. For more than two decades many strategists have recognized that nuclear war is not a valid policy option, and the writing of Soviet strategists or their Western clones about nuclear war fighting did not alter the validity of such perceptions. Equally distressing, however, is the possibility that the power of so-called conventional weapons is so great that they too can no longer serve the ends of policy. How, one wonders, is a nation as powerful as the United States to use the highly destructive weapons its technology provides in support of its national policy? With time even a seemingly successful military intervention such as Desert Storm in the Persian Gulf will appear to have achieved far less than was first thought.

Vietnam provided clear evidence of what an American military effort can mean in terms of destruction and waste of human life and resources. It was far removed from the village burning and isolated war crimes of the Philippine-American war. The emphasis in the twentieth century on firepower and the reliance on the gadgetry that modern technology can produce has changed war significantly. The change has been so extensive that great powers using the most sophisticated conventional weapons available to them seem no longer able to engage in revolutionary conflicts such as that in Vietnam without destroying the very people they are trying to aid. The same may be true of dedicated revolutionaries, particularly when opposed by equally dedicated and well-prepared opponents. Comparable problems appear to exist not only in more conventional military interventions, but also in humanitarian relief operations and peace keeping missions as well. Unfortunately, few political leaders appear to understand how little can be achieved by the use of military force, and even the few who possess such an understanding often find themselves with a lack of alternatives in a world where resorting to military action remains an acceptable response for both states and discontented groups within them.

[\[1\]](#) Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Bitter Heritage: Vietnam and American Democracy, 1941-1966* (Greenwich, Conn., 1966), 89.

[\[2\]](#) Stuart C. Miller, "Our MyLai of 1900: Americans in the Philippine Insurrection," *Trans-action* (September, 1970), 19.

[\[3\]](#) Dino J. Caterini, "Repeating Ourselves: The Philippine Insurrection and the Vietnam War," *Foreign Service Journal* (Dec. 1977), 11.

[\[4\]](#) Miller, "Our MyLai of 1900," 19 and Luzviminda Francisco, "The First Vietnam: The U.S.-Philippine War of 1899," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 5 (1973), 12.

[\[5\]](#) Daniel B. Schirmer, *Republic or Empire: American Resistance to the Philippine War* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), 256.

[\[6\]](#) D. B. Schirmer, "MyLai Was Not the First Time," *The New Republic* (April 24, 1971), 21.

[\[7\]](#) Otis showed his interest in the political dimensions of the conflict both in his regular messages to Washington and in his annual reports. For the former see *Correspondence Relating to the War with Spain, April 15, 1898-July 30, 1902*, 2 vols. (Washington, 1902), II. For the latter see *Annual Reports of the War Department for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1899*, House Document 2, 56th Congress, 1st Session, V and *Annual Reports of the War Department for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1900*, House Document 2, 56th Congress, 2d Session, V.

[8] Parker to Theodore Roosevelt, October 13, 1900, found in Roosevelt to Elihu Root, November 24, 1900, Elihu Root Paper, Library of Congress.

[9] Field Order No. 26, Headquarters 2d Division, 8th Army Corps, April 22, 1899, reprinted in Senate Document 331, 57th Congress, 1st Session, Part 2, 893.

[10] R. F. Santos, Circular No. 21, August 24, 1900 in John R. M. Taylor, "The Philippine Insurrection Against the United States--A Compilation of Documents with Notes and Introduction," 5 vols. (unpublished galley proofs, 1906), 58GV.

[11] Taft to Root, October 10, 1900, Root Papers.

[12] The definitive work on the war in Batangas is Glenn Anthony May, *Battle for Batangas: A Philippine Province at War* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1991). Although critical of Bell's campaign, May has tempered his criticism over time and significantly reduced his estimate of the campaign's casualties among the Filipino population. Compare *Battle for Batangas* with Glenn A. May, "Filipino Resistance to American Occupation: Batangas, 1899-1902," *Pacific Historical Review*, 48 (1979), 531-556.

[13] Taft to Root, October 14, 1901, Root Papers.

[14] *Telegraphic Circulars and General Orders, Regulating Campaign Against Insurgents and Proclamations and Circular Letters, Relating to Reconstruction After Close of War in the Provinces of Batangas, Laguna, and Mindoro, P.I. Issued by Brigadier General J. Franklin Bell, U.S. Army, Commanding Brigade, from December 1, 1901 to December 1, 1902* (Batangas, 1902), AGO 415839, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 94, U.S. National Archives, iii.

[15] Miller, "Our Mylai of 1900," 22.

[16] Eric C. Ludvigsen, "Vietnam--in 21 Volumes," *Army* (August 1977), 30 and Bruce Palmer, Jr., letter to the editor, *Military Review* 69 (Jan. 1989), 103.

[17] See Robert N. Ginsburgh, "Damn the Insurrectos," *Military Review*, 44 (Jan. 1964), 58-70.

[18] The Supreme Command, Far East. *Lessons from the Indo-China War*, 3 vols. (n.p., May 31, 1955), trans. by Advanced Research Projects Agency. Vol. I not yet released by French.

[19] Richard M. Pfeffer, ed., *No More Vietnams? The War and the Future of American Foreign Policy* (New York, 1968) 38.

[20] Walter Millis, *Arms and Men* (New York, 1956), 364.

[21] Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (New York, 1973), 477.