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The Impact of the Imperial Wars (1898–1907) on the U.S. Army

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The United States Army as an institution devotes considerable attention to the study of history as a guide for current and future policy. Much of the current Army transformation program is justified by appeals to the supposed lessons of the past. Indeed, until recently, it was almost impossible to attend an Army transformation briefing that did not contain at least one slide on the Blitzkrieg and the Maginot Line. Historical vignettes illustrating tactics, leadership, and Army values fill doctrinal manuals, and professional journals often publish articles that draw parallels between the past and present. Military history also plays a significant role in professional military education, from ROTC classes to the Army War College.

The Army also has institutionalized the study of the past in places such as the Center of Military History, the Military History Institute, the Combat Studies Institute, and the Center for Army Lessons Learned. The Army's published histories on World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam Conflict remain the benchmark for operational history. Even academic historians, who have a philosophic bias against any practical application of their discipline, must acknowledge the quality of the research, the institutional effort expended on studying the past, and the sophistication of much of the historical analysis.

Yet, until comparatively recently, the Army has largely limited its focus on historical “lessons learned” to large-scale conventional operations or the “Big Wars”—particularly the Civil War and World War II and, to a lesser extent, peacetime periods of transfor-

Talking Points

- The United States Army devotes considerable attention to the study of history as a guide for current and future policy, yet it has largely ignored the study of the irregular conflicts that have been, and continue to be, the service's more common experience.
- The American experience in the Philippines during the 1899–1902 imperial wars showcases both senior and junior leaders' ability to adapt and innovate to local conditions, to recognize the nature of insurgency, and to develop highly effective counterinsurgency methods and policies.
- Today's military is far more structured, centralized, and bound by a doctrine that emphasizes large-scale conventional operations. The lack of attention to and interest in stability operations has had increasingly serious consequences for U.S. military policy.

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mation such as the post-1898 “Root Reforms,” the 1919–41 Interwar Era, and the pre–Gulf War period which prepared it to fight such wars. Institutionally, the Army has largely ignored the study of the irregular conflicts that have been, and continue to be, the service’s more common experience.

Indicative of the Army’s limited focus is that it published an official history of the Gulf War in 1993, but not until 1998 did the Army historical program publish the first comprehensive analysis of Army counterinsurgency and stability operations between the Civil War and World War II.¹ A projected volume studying post-WWII operations has been hung up in the publication process for almost half a decade.

This year, with American troops engaged in a frustrating, bloody, and unpopular stability campaign in Iraq, the core curriculum at the Army’s Command and General Staff College devoted only one lesson to studying guerrilla war—the same as it devoted to the campaigns of Frederick the Great and a fraction of what it devoted to World War II. The terms used for irregular warfare in military lexicon—“Operations Other than War” or “Stability and Support Operations”—indicate the professional military’s conviction that these are tasks that are subordinate to, and detract from, their mission of “Warfighting.”

Thus, to assess the impact of the Army’s experience in pacification and stability operations in the Philippines in the early 20th century first requires some examination of the institutional and cultural factors that affected, and often inhibited, how this experience was assimilated.

From its origins in 1784, the United States standing army or “Regular Army” faced a competitive tradition of citizen soldiering that was believed, at least

in many Americans’ minds, to have demonstrated its prowess in unconventional warfare and “Indian fighting.” Although much of its combat experience was in irregular warfare along the frontier, it was necessary for the Regular Army to develop a distinct identity. The design and construction of complex fortifications to protect the Atlantic seaports from foreign attack provided such an identity.

With the support of its civilian superiors, the post–War of 1812 Regulars defined professional expertise as the practice of “scientific warfare” of the kind practiced by the European Great Powers. The Army’s strategic and intellectual tradition—outlined by Dennis Hart Mahan, Henry Halleck, and Emory Upton—focused on military engineering and large-scale conventional warfare. Frontier fighting, counter-guerrilla operations, and peacekeeping were dismissed as little more than skirmishing and police work.

The Regular Army’s focus on campaigns and battles, and its denigration of irregular conflict and peacekeeping as a nuisance and distraction, was reinforced by the Civil War, and particularly by General Orders 100. Issued in 1863, these directives to Union forces incorporated both a philosophical explanation and practical methods for occupation and pacification within the larger context of conventional war. In making a clear distinction between “civilized” (conventional) and “savage” (guerrilla) war, G.O. 100 made popular resistance to military occupation a criminal activity and legitimized harsh retaliation against insurgents and the communities that supported them. The Army’s success in suppressing guerrilla war in the Confederacy contributed to the belief that mastering conventional warfare was more professionally challenging.²

1. Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860–1941* (Washington: Center of Military History, 1998); Robert Scales, Terry Johnson, and Thomas Odom, *Certain Victory: The U.S. Army in the Gulf War* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993). Some recent examples of the high quality of “official” Army analysis of irregular conflicts and peacekeeping are Roger F. Bauman and Lawrence F. Yates with Veralle F. Washington, *“My Clan Against the World”: US and Coalition Forces in Somalia, 1992–1994* (Fort Leavenworth, Kan.: Combat Studies Institute, 2004); Gordon W. Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention: Assisting the Iraqi Kurds in Operation Provide Comfort, 1991* (Washington: Department of the Army, 2004); and *Armed Diplomacy: Two Centuries of American Campaigning* (Fort Leavenworth, Kan.: Combat Studies Institute, 2004).
2. Robert R. Mackey, *The Uncivil War: Irregular Warfare in the Upper South, 1861–1865* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004); Robert Wooster, *The Military and United States Indian Policy, 1865–1903* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1988).

Peacekeeping and pacification also fell outside of what might be termed the “Regular Army Narrative.” Most notably outlined by Upton, this cyclical interpretation of American military history posits that owing to its flawed military policy, the United States will never be ready for war.

In the Narrative, wartime victory—won by the enlightened leadership of Regular Army generals—is almost inevitably squandered. Politicians and the public demand immediate demobilization, soon weakening the armed forces to pathetic levels and denying them the resources needed to maintain their fighting efficiency. The Army’s history in peacetime is interpreted as a constant battle by responsible and prescient military officers to avoid the destruction of the nation’s security and to prepare for a future war that they alone foresee. Yet when this war then occurs, it is these same scorned military officers who step in and guide the Republic to victory.³ What Roger Spiller has referred to as the “small change of soldiering”—peacekeeping, pacification, counterinsurgency, and similar duties—comprises almost no part of this Narrative, except perhaps to provide stirring tales of valor and to explain away any sub-par performance by the Regulars in the Big Wars.⁴

Given both its own institutional priorities and the power of the Regular Army Narrative, the Army has encountered numerous intellectual barriers to assimilating the lessons of its constabulary experience. In many ways, studying the impact of the Philippine conflicts provides as much insight into the problems inherent in overcoming these barriers as it does into such practical (and immediate) subjects as tactics and developing native forces.

Experience of Philippine Stability Operations

The Army’s peacekeeping or stability experience in the Philippines can be divided into three parts.

- The first phase was a conventional war waged in central Luzon against Emilio Aguinaldo’s nationalist forces from February to December 1899.
- The second phase was a pacification campaign for control of the archipelago that was effectively over by mid-1901 and officially ended in July 1902. During this phase, Filipino nationalists and other insurgents no longer sought victory on the battlefield, but rather to deny American control in the countryside through ambushes, harassment, and attacks on Filipinos who collaborated. In turn, the U.S. forces waged a series of regional pacification campaigns that gradually isolated the guerrillas from their civilian supporters.
- The third phase consisted of limited counterinsurgency campaigns against recalcitrant rebels, religious sects, brigands, and Muslim tribesmen, all of which were effectively suppressed by 1913.

In the Philippines, the Americans soon learned that effective pacification and peacekeeping was based on the realities of fighting in an archipelago and on local politics. The rebels lacked weaponry, training, and centralized leadership, and were too weak militarily to challenge more than small detachments of troops. Instead of a national war, resistance consisted of a series of regional conflicts waged by local political-military *jefes*. As a result, the nature of military operations varied greatly from island to island, from province to province, and even from village to village.

In some areas, such as Southern Luzon, many of the elite landowners were initially united in their resistance to the American rule, but they later supported the government in its campaigns against lower-class brigands. In other places, like the Muslim areas of the Southern Philippines, tribesmen supported the Army against Catholic Filipino rebels.

3. Emory Upton, *The Military Policy of the United States* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1904). The continued popularity of “Army Narrative” can be seen in recent autobiographies by senior Army officers: for example, Tommy Franks and Malcolm McConnell, *American Soldier* (New York: Regan Books, 2004); Colin Powell and Joseph Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Ballantine, 1996); and Norman Schwartzkopf, *It Doesn’t Take a Hero* (New York: Bantam, 1993).

4. Roger Spiller, “The Small Change of Soldiering and American Military Experience,” *Australian Army Journal*, Vol. 2 (Winter 2004), pp. 165–175.

There, resistance only began after 1902 and came from some tribal leaders and individual jihadists; there was no unified religious opposition.

On the Visayan island of Samar, nationalist guerrillas united with a popular sect to wage a bloody guerrilla war from 1900 to 1902. But this alliance soon fractured, and when the sectarians revolted in 1904, many former nationalist guerrillas joined the Americans in hunting them down. On another Visayan island, Negros, the local elite welcomed the Americans as liberators, and the resistance movement consisted largely of another sect, the Babylanes, who were hostile to everyone. Such diverse and fragmented resistance occurred on the local level as well, so that it was not unusual for the American garrison in one town to be under constant sniping and attacks while their comrades a dozen miles away might not hear a shot fired for months.

At its simplest, American pacification—a term that meant both the restoration of peace and the imposition of law, order, and social control on the population—balanced coercion with conciliation. The latter was addressed by President William McKinley in his December 1898 “benevolent assimilation” instructions to the military commanders in the Philippines.

During the conventional war of 1899, the Army took some tentative but important steps in developing a plan for local government, incorporating Filipino troops, and establishing priorities for social reform. In 1900, the first year of the occupation/guerrilla war, Army headquarters in Manila emphasized a “hearts-and-minds” approach, seeking to provide honest and efficient administration, education, medicine, civic projects, and other social reforms. Although criticized by some officers in the field as out of touch and poorly suited to the far more important task of suppressing armed resistance, it played a vital role in securing acceptance of American colonial rule in many locales.

If conciliation was the official pacification policy, coercion was its less authorized but widely used counterpart. From the beginning of the fighting, soldiers destroyed property and otherwise punished those suspected of aiding the insurgents. In December 1901, following a resurgence of violence aimed at influencing the U.S. presidential elections, coercion became official with the issuing of General Orders 100. In areas that continued to violently oppose occupation, there was widespread burning of crops and homes, arrests and deportations, and population resettlement.

A third aspect of American pacification was the incorporation of large segments of the Filipino population. This occurred on several levels, from the appointment of civic officials (mayors and police) to the use of spies and porters and to the raising of military units. Although the Army high command was, in retrospect, far too cautious in authorizing the use of Filipino forces, these proved instrumental in the last campaigns of the Philippine War and the post-1902 counterinsurgency campaigns. The Philippine Scouts and Philippine Constabulary became the backbone of the colonial peacekeeping establishment, making the campaigns more intra-Filipino conflicts than Fil-American ones.⁵

Impact of the Imperial Wars on the Army

The occupation and pacification of the Philippines accelerated the Army’s transformation from frontier constabulary to modern industrial-age military organization. Indeed, together with the Cuban campaign of 1898, they effectively destroyed the “Old Army” that had provided the nation’s standing forces since 1784.⁶ The Civil War veterans who had dominated the Army’s senior levels since 1865 were forced to retire because of age, physical infirmity, or disease. By the official end of the Philippine War in 1902, the Army was a very different organization: Almost two-thirds of its nearly 3,000 officers had been commissioned in the last four years.

5. Brian McAllister Linn, *The Philippine War, 1899–1902* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000), and *Guardians of Empire: The U.S. Army and the Pacific, 1902–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

6. Edward M. Coffman, *The Old Army: A Portrait of the American Army in Peacetime, 1784–1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

The new Army also had a new mission. Whereas most of the Old Army had been deployed on the frontier in peacekeeping duties, Secretary of War Elihu Root (1899–1903) declared the new Army would have one essential purpose in peacetime—to prepare to wage the nation’s wars.

But, as has usually been the case, the war that the Army chose to prepare for was not the war that it had recently fought in the Caribbean and Philippines, nor indeed the minor conflicts it was still fighting in the archipelago. Rather, the Army focused on two future scenarios, one very old and one new. The old scenario was the defense of the coastline of the continental United States against an amphibious raid by a European Great Power. The second extended the threat of a raid to Pearl and Honolulu harbors in Hawaii and Manila and Subic bays in the Philippines. To meet both of these, the Army developed a thoroughly modern coastal defense system—complete with state-of-the-art weaponry and fortifications, highly sophisticated range-finding systems, and a cadre of expert gunners, engineers, and technicians. It also sought to create a “Mobile Army” of divisions and brigades, supplemented by the newly organized reserves (National Guard) and equipped with the newest weaponry.

It very quickly emerged that the commitment to guard the Pacific possessions was incompatible with creating this new model army. The primary problem was manpower. Although the Army was authorized at 100,000 (four times its strength in 1898), its actual manpower hovered between 63,000 and 81,000 in the first decade of the 20th century. Economic prosperity in the civilian sector and bad pay and dismal living conditions in the service drove out officers and enlisted personnel. Repeated military commitments to the Caribbean and the Pacific meant sustained deployments: At times, almost half

the Army was outside the continental United States.⁷ A series of misguided personnel policies exacerbated the situation: Sometimes an officer would arrive after a three-month trip to Manila and then be reassigned and have to take the next transport back. Not until 1912 were the most serious problems addressed with the creation of a distinct overseas military organization, and then only by largely abandoning the pretense of adequately manning of the Philippines and Hawaii.

The imperial wars thus had a substantial effect on the postwar Army’s evolution into the modern force, but that impact was largely negative. With few exceptions, the defense of the Pacific territories retarded Army transformation.

Effect of the Imperial Wars on Military Thought

It would be an exaggeration to state that the Army learned nothing from the imperial wars. Allan R. Millett has persuasively argued that they impressed Regulars with the potential of rapidly raised and trained citizen-soldiers, particularly the 35,000-man U.S. Volunteer force that did much of the fighting in the Philippines in 1900–1901. But too often, the lessons learned were merely the reaffirmation of existing prejudices, particularly the Regulars’ long-held belief that pacification operations were “a thankless sort of service.”⁸

The imperial wars also vindicated the Regular Army Narrative. The nation had been unprepared and overconfident, and, as one officer concluded, “we won the war thus mainly because our adversary was too weak to fight.”⁹ Moreover, the wars revealed much the Army had no wish to explore about its own often mediocre performance.¹⁰ Army officers who sought “lessons learned” thus had to reconcile two somewhat contradictory objectives: first, to extract information that would increase the

7. Johnson Hagood, *Circular Relative to Pay of Officers and Enlisted Men of the Army* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1907).

8. William H. Carter, “The Next Head of the Army,” *Munsey’s Magazine*, Vol. 28 (March 1903), p. 811; Allan R. Millett, “Commentary,” in Joe E. Dixon, ed., *The American Military and the Far East: Proceedings of the Ninth Military History Symposium* (Washington: U.S. Air Force Academy, 1980), pp. 176–180.

9. “Notes and Diaries,” 121, Box 1, William E. Lassiter Papers, CU 3394, Special Collections, U.S. Military Academy Library, West Point, N.Y.

efficiency of their service; second, to protect their service's reputation. Not surprisingly, writers focused on problems that could be immediately addressed, particularly tactics.¹¹

In fairness to Army military theorists, the Philippines provided a difficult problem of interpretation. Once the conventional war ended in late 1899, American pacification was based as much on individual officers' adjustment to local conditions as it was on policy from Army headquarters in Manila. Efforts to establish a coherent operational narrative floundered amidst the diversity of experiences. There was no centralized resistance, either political or ideological. Rather, soldiers faced a fragmented array of brigands, clans, sects, local paramilitaries, and so on. Troops spent the vast majority of their time on guard duty and patrolling the countryside; in building barracks, roads, and bridges; and in a host of civil affairs projects.

From 1900 to 1913, only two engagements may be termed battles; the rest were ambushes, fire-fights, and skirmishes. The major campaigns had little connection with each other and were won by implementing a variety of techniques to overcome the resistance in a particular locale; efforts to transplant these methods were seldom successful.

Perhaps most important, taken together, these pacification campaigns confirmed the prevailing

Army belief that it was sufficient to extemporize from the existing tactics. Such improvisation, together with the advantages conveyed by better weapons, training, and logistics, all but guaranteed victory over time. In many ways, the very success of the Army mitigated against its having to learn from its experiences.

Nevertheless, conscientious officers could glean a great deal of insight into guerrilla warfare, peace-keeping, and pacification from the annual reports of the War Department between 1898 and 1907. In addition to presenting the analysis of the senior military commanders, these volumes also included a wide range of operational accounts ranging from small skirmishes to major battles.

The service journals printed several articles on combat on the Philippines, as well as on the Boer War and the Boxer Rebellion. Some of these contained a wealth of information. For example, Major Hugh D. Wise's account of fighting sectarians on the island of Samar include not only a detailed study of enemy and American tactics, but also information on logistics, intelligence, and winning over the local population.¹² Robert L. Bullard contributed several articles on his experiences with Moros and emphasized that peacemaking was likely to be as important as war-fighting in the Army's foreseeable future.¹³ But Bullard's views were in a distinct minority, and he himself

10. For Army criticisms of its operations in the 1898 campaign, see S. D. Rockenbach, "Some Experiences and Impressions of a 2nd Lieutenant of Cavalry in the Santiago Campaign," *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 40 (March–April 1931), p. 42; Spanish War Diary, Charles D. Rhodes Papers, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress; E. O. Cord, "The Battle of Caney: As Seen by a Member of Company B, 22nd Infantry," n.d., Box 221, Leonard Wood Papers, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress; "One Soldier's Journey," George van Horn Moseley Papers, Box 1, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, California; and "On the Edge: Personal Recollections of an American Officer," 1934, Cornelius de Witt Willcox Papers, U.S. Military Academy Library.
11. John Bigelow, *Reminiscences of the Santiago Campaign* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1899); Arthur L. Wagner, *Report of the Santiago Campaign, 1898* (Kansas City: F. Hudson, 1908); Herbert H. Sargent, *The Campaign of Santiago de Cuba*, 3 vols. (1907, reprinted Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1970); and Todd R. Brereton, "First Lessons in Modern War: Arthur Wagner, the 1898 Santiago Campaign, and the U.S. Army Lesson-Learning," *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 64 (January 2000), pp. 79–96.
12. Hugh D. Wise, "Notes on Field Service in Samar," *Journal of the U.S. Infantry Association*, Vol. 4 (July 1907), pp. 3–58. Between 1899 and 1904, the leading professional journal—the *Journal of the Military Service Institute*—contained six articles on combat in the Philippines, three on the Boer War, two on China, two on guerrilla war, and 10 on Philippine-related topics such as native scouts. On the distribution of War Department reports, see George C. Marshall, *Interviews and Reminiscences for Forrest C. Pogue*, rev. ed. (Lexington, Va.: George C. Marshall Research Foundation, 1991), p. 139.
13. Robert L. Bullard, "Military Pacification," *Journal of the Military Service Institute*, Vol. 46 (January–February 1910), pp. 1–24, and "Road Building Among the Moros," *Atlantic Monthly*, December 1903, pp. 818–826.

soon became, like many of his peers, an advocate of preparing the Army for Great Power conflict.

Indeed, far from drawing lessons for future counterinsurgency campaigns, there was far more concern that the imperial wars “played havoc” with officers’ tactical judgment and “inculcated erroneous and regrettable ideas.”¹⁴ Major General Leonard Wood, for example, believed that in the Philippine War:

[W]e were opposed by a very inferior enemy and moved as it suited us, conditions which do not exist when confronted by troops trained for war and well-handled. Lessons taught in schools of this sort are of little value and usually result in false deductions and a confidence which spells disaster when called upon to play the real game.¹⁵

Significantly, Wood’s attitude was indicative of his service. The new tactical systems, first articulated in the *Field Service Regulations* of 1905, incorporated virtually nothing from the imperial wars. There was no effort to release a manual on small wars or bush tactics, and officers in the Philippines noted that many of the tactical formations recommended in their manuals were completely impractical in jungles or rice paddies.

Some individuals who might have been expected at the forefront of developing a small-wars doctrine were conspicuously silent. Henry T. Allen wrote articles on the Russo–Japanese War but nothing on what he had learned in almost five years as a combat officer and commandant of the Philippine Constabulary. Brigadier General J. Franklin Bell, widely viewed as the most effective commander in the Islands, was supposed to prepare a detailed narrative of the lessons he had learned. But Bell, perhaps wisely, decided it would be far too controversial and instead devoted his time to military education. The only record of Bell’s policies comes from a staff officer who privately printed 500 copies of the general’s telegraphic orders on the grounds that they

were “classics on native warfare and were needed by not only the young officers of our army but by the older ones as well.”¹⁶

The Army also failed to support the most ambitious effort to capture the lessons of the war, John R. M. Taylor’s five-volume *The Philippine Insurrection Against the United States*. Fascinated by the dynamics of the guerrilla resistance, Taylor included over 1,000 captured documents that detailed the military structure, financial system, and strategy of the insurgents. Of equal importance, the documents showed how decentralized the guerrillas were, how divided by factions and personality clashes, and how they sought to ensure popular support. In sum, the work was an invaluable resource on the dynamics of agrarian insurgency, as useful to officers today as a century ago.

But Taylor’s dislike of the civil government that replaced military rule offended former civil servant James A. LeRoy. LeRoy, who was writing his own history of the war, urged William Howard Taft to suppress Taylor’s work completely rather than allow its revision. Taylor tried for years to reverse this decision. In 1914, he urged that at least the chapters on guerrilla war be distributed to the troops deployed to Vera Cruz. But the Army leadership refused to support him, and the book was soon forgotten. Only in 1971 was the book published, ironically by a Filipino historical association.¹⁷

Similarly, the Army made almost no effort to incorporate the lessons of the Philippine experience into its professional education system. At the staff college at Fort Leavenworth and the Army War College, students studied European-based “military science” and large-unit conflicts such as the Civil War, the German Wars of Unification, and the Russo–Japanese War. But it is virtually impossible to find any mention in the curriculum of the lessons learned in the Philippines on counterinsurgency, peacekeeping, or occupation. Between 1903 and 1911, the Army’s strategic planning agency, the

14. Sand-30, “Trench, Parapet, or the Open,” *Journal of the Military Service Institute*, Vol. 31 (July 1902), pp. 471–486.

15. Leonard Wood to AG, U.S. Army, 1 July 1907, Box 40, Wood Papers.

16. Milton F. Davis to Matthew F. Steele, 12 January 1903, Box 11, Matthew F. Steele Papers, Military History Institute, Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

Army War College, compiled some 500 notecards relating to topics of military interest. These cards indexed reports on European armies, weaponry, the Russo–Japanese War, and translations of military articles but contained only one entry on the “Philippine Question” and none on guerrilla war, pacification, or counterinsurgency.¹⁸

In the Philippines, there was only slightly more interest. In the first decade after the end of the war, when fears of a new insurrection were widespread, there was some effort to maintain institutional memory. Troops were stationed in areas that were seen as potential centers of rebellion, headquarters circulated operational reports as a means of teaching tactics and techniques, and there were even surveys of combat officers. But with the end of the Pulahan campaign in 1907 and the rapid shift of the Scouts from pacification to preparing to repel invasion, this knowledge was soon forgotten.

In 1936, Charles H. Gerhardt, a staff officer in the Army’s Philippine Department in Manila, was unable to locate a single study of military operations during the Philippine War. Yet when Gerhardt wrote his own history of this period, he focused entirely on the large-unit conventional operations in 1899. The ensuing far bloodier and far longer pacification and peacekeeping operations in the Islands he dismissed as no more than “a very extended police system” and thus unworthy of serious consideration for military study.¹⁹

Gerhardt’s disinterest in the very operations that are today of far more interest than the long-forgotten

battles of 1899 illustrates a central issue—and central problem—in understanding the impact of experience on military institutions. At the time he was writing, the Philippines had been internally peaceful for a quarter of a century; no Army officer seriously worried about a new insurrection or a resumption of guerrilla war. Indeed, most were preparing (and hoping) to withdraw from the Islands entirely when they became independent in 1946.

Gerhardt’s focus was thus firmly fixed on what the Army had seen as its primary mission as far back as 1905: defending Manila Bay, and perhaps Luzon, from a Japanese invasion. Thus, he was seeking to draw lessons not on pacification, but on how conventional forces had campaigned in the same region which, it was widely believed, would be the primary battleground should Japan attack. Given that this very scenario would be played out within five years of his report, it is hard to fault Gerhardt’s or the Army’s priorities.

The Constant Refrain

It is a constant refrain that the United States military, and particularly the Army, always has to relearn the lessons of its past experience with counterinsurgency. This refrain is correct, but it begs far more complex and difficult questions about institutional culture and history. In its assessment of the imperial wars, and specifically in the Philippines, the Army found ample justification not only for its interpretation of history (the Regular Army Narrative), but also for its ability to perform “police” activities. The lessons that might have been learned

17. John R. M. Taylor to Secretary, War College Division, 24 August 1914, WCD 8699-2, Entry 296, RG 165, National Archives, Washington; John R. M. Taylor, *The Philippine Insurrection Against the United States, 1898–1903: A Compilation of Documents and Introduction*, 5 vols. (1906, reprinted Pasay City, P.I.: The Eugenio Lopez Foundation, 1971); John M. Gates, “The Official Historian and the Well-Placed Critic: James A. LeRoy’s Assessment of John R. M. Taylor’s *The Philippine Insurrection Against the United States*,” *The Public Historian*, Vol. 7 (Summer 1985), pp. 57–67; William T. Johnston, “Methods Used in Solving Problems Presented by Guerrilla Warfare in the Philippines,” 10 July 1905, Roll 6, National Archives Microfilm Record M-1023.
18. T. W. Jones to Superintendent, USMA, 5 November 1905, Entry 301, RG 165; Army War College, Record Cards for Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1903–1910, Entry 291, RG 165; Timothy K. Nenninger, *The Leavenworth Schools and the Old Army: Education, Professionalism, and the Officer Corps of the United States Army, 1881–1918* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1978).
19. C. H. Gerhardt, “An Account of the Conduct of the Armed Forces of the U.S. in the Philippine Islands, 1898–1902, from the Viewpoint of the High Command,” March 1936, Pre-Presidential Papers, Box 154 Philippine Island File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

from pacification and peacekeeping in the Islands appeared to confirm preexisting convictions about the importance of improvisation and adaptability.

But the very diversity of military experience in such localized and multi-faceted campaigns mitigated against their impact. Indeed, the nature of the fighting raised concern that officers were more likely to have learned the wrong lessons than they were to have learned the right ones. The conviction of much of the top American Expeditionary Forces' leadership—nearly all of them veterans of fighting in the Philippines—that rifle-and-bayonet-equipped light infantry could successfully assault German entrenchments is indicative that such concern was justified.

Finally, the threat of Japanese attack, which became apparent in 1905 and was an urgent priority by 1907, distracted the Army from assimilating the lessons of pacification. Believing that it was finally preparing for a Big War that was worthy of its professional expertise, the Army with some satisfaction turned to constructing coastal defenses and exercising brigades. Not for many more years would the need to relearn the lessons of pacification, peacekeeping, and occupation once again intrude upon the Army's consciousness.

Conclusion: Policy Implications

There is a great deal that both military officers and defense analysts can learn from studying the Philippine experience.

First, it remains the United States' most successful counterinsurgency campaign and reveals a wealth of information about recruiting and training native military forces, establishing viable civil governments and political parties, integrating civic development with military operations, and many other issues. There is also a great deal of practical information on tactics, logistics, intelligence collection, and administration.

Perhaps most important, the Philippines can provide conceptual tools for anticipating the consequences of both strategic policies and tactical measures today. For example, anyone with a historical awareness of the Philippine experience should have anticipated both the emergence of an insurgency in

Iraq and the diverse nature of Iraqi armed resistance. Such historical awareness was clearly lacking, and in many respects, the American military occupation has given ample proof of the old adage that those who do not learn from the past are condemned to repeat it.

Second, predetermined agendas will inhibit, if not completely prevent a military organization's ability to learn from the past. For much of the Regular Army military intellectual community, history was, is, and will continue to be a tool with which to better fight major conventional wars and, to a lesser extent, to understand the transformation process needed to prepare for such large-scale wars.

The implications for the future are that the Army will continue to seek guidance, inspiration, and vindication only from those historical precedents that justify a focus on large-scale conventional war—hence the interest in the Interwar Era—and ignore those that suggest more attention to stability operations. Policymakers must thus exercise a healthy skepticism of service arguments based on the “lessons of history.”

Third, military culture plays a vital and often unrecognized role in how institutions incorporate and assimilate wartime experience and how they define themselves. In the past, and probably in the future, the Regular Army officer corps has confined its definition of military expertise almost entirely to large-scale conventional operations. It has been very resistant to any prolonged theoretical exploration of peacekeeping, pacification, occupation, stability operations, and counterinsurgency.

Given the military's very narrow definition of what constitutes its professional expertise, it is reasonable for civilian policymakers to expect senior military leaders to provide informed (if institutionally self-serving) guidance on large-scale operations, tactics, and weapons. It is not at all wise to assume equally informed advice on peacekeeping, pacification, stability operations, occupation, and counterinsurgency.

Fourth, the lack of attention to and interest in stability operations has had increasingly serious consequences for U.S. military policy. In the Philippines, both senior and junior leaders were able to adapt

and innovate to local conditions, to recognize the nature of the insurgency, and to develop highly effective counterinsurgency methods and policies.

But today's military is far more structured, centralized, and bound by a doctrine that emphasizes large-scale conventional operations. It is also far more committed to the full employment of sophisticated weapons systems whose impact as "force-multipliers" is dubious. A helicopter gunship may provide the equivalent firepower of an infantry company, but its maintenance also removes the equivalent of an infantry company from the field. Despite all the rhetoric of transformation, policy-makers cannot expect military officers raised in a zero-defects RTC-exercise-driven institution to

adapt and innovate to insurgencies with nearly the same facility as their far less intellectually and equipment-burdened predecessors did in 1900.

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