

The Changing Spectrum of War

The US was already getting deeper into the Vietnam 'War' when we tackled the question about what kind of 'war' was Vietnam - and will there be more in the future. For if there were going to be more conflicts like Vietnam, just how should the Army prepare for these, and what kind of US means should be applied to such conflicts?

There were already debates in the US Government on not only 'whether' we should be involved, and if so, how should we respond. Just with military force?

Also, already, President Kennedy, before he was assassinated, had given Army Special Forces - the 'Green Berets' special visibility and recognition that stemmed from the advice given to him by his 'Brain Trust'. Highly educated advisers like Ted Sorensen, Walt Rostow, McGeorge Bundy, studied the way North Vietnam was clandestinely invading South Korea, using a combination of assassination, guerilla tactics, but also local remote area, grass roots 'political education' efforts to contrast themselves with the corrupt central South Korean Regime. So they turned to US Army Special Forces who were selected and trained to operate underground, and knew local languages and cultures where they operated.

So the Kennedy Administration started its efforts to save an independent South Vietnam by sending Special Forces, nominally as 'advisors' and trainers of South

Vietnamese forces. And, just as the new initiatives announced for a 'Peace Corps' made up of young, unarmed, idealistic Americans going into remote and rural 3d World places to 'help' those societies, the same idealistic idea of 'countering' communist subversion in remote areas of South Vietnam being progressively 'taken over' by communist Viet Cong, by armed US Special Forces or those trained by them who also tried to win the trust and support of rural peasants with ameliorative medical, educational, agricultural efforts was the first serious effort at a new strategy for US backed 'counterinsurgency.'

While the US military long had a history of dealing with 'guerilla' warfare tactics, and it had created Special Forces to enter 'behind enemy lines' in order to organize resistance movements, its only modern successful efforts to defeat a communist backed insurgency, was in the Philippines in the early 1950s where an Air Corps Officer - Ed Landsdale helped the Philippine Armed Forces develop a strategy of psychological operations along with "Civic Action" programs to 'win hearts and minds' of those being recruited by the communists.

But there were several problems with this 'Green Beret' approach to Vietnam.

First of all, as the Viet Cong, backed by North Vietnam continued to succeed with its creeping insurgency, the US response was dominated by deploying regular Army and Marine conventional-war

combat units relying on greater firepower when and if it could find insurgents - with the only innovation being use of Huey helicopters in search and destroy missions.

Secondly the US higher commanders were neither experienced or trained in Special Forces type 'counterinsurgency' and were convinced those 'peasants' could be defeated by enough modern conventional forces. They mistrusted the unconventional Special Forces except for 'special operations' not the main conventional operations.

Thirdly, except for the small number of Special Force units, the overwhelming number of Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine units going into Vietnam had been organized and trained as Conventional War units.

What would have to be done - and for future, and not just for the current, war, would be a top down set of new policies, strategies, organizations, equipment, and training.

It was toward that end that our Study was addressed. And we started by studying every war in the world for the past 100 years. To identify Ends, Means, and Outcomes.