Comparing US Counter Insurgency Actions in the Philippines in 1950s and Vietnam in 1960s: Why Did One Succeed and One Fail?

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Abstract
In the early Cold War decades, the United States was heavily involved in anticommunist counterinsurgencies in various spots around the world. Two of the more well known counterinsurgencies of the time were The Huk Rebellion on the island of Luzon in the Philippines and the Vietcong in South Vietnam. Despite the fact that these two insurgencies were similar in several ways and many of the same counterinsurgency experts participated in both campaign, the outcomes were quite different with the Huk Rebellion successfully being put down while Vietnam eventually fell to its insurgency.

The Philippines
The counterinsurgency in the Philippines was successful in large part due to Lt. Col. Edward Lansdale’s strategy as well as cooperation with the Filipino President Ramon Magsaysay. Lansdale’s strategy of improving troop behavior as well as focusing on population protection rather than killing insurgents in addition to Magsaysay’s anticorruption campaign and improvement of living standards led to support from the peasantry and eventually defeat of the Huk’s.

Vietnam
The counterinsurgency in Vietnam was unsuccessful due to a variety of factors first among them being the rampant corruption of the Diem Regime and its unwillingness to address that issue. Edward Lansdale used the same strategy that had previously been effective in the Philippines but due to the ineffectiveness of the Diem Regime in addressing troop brutality, failure to improve standards of living, and an inability to protect its population, the strategy was useless.