

Two Counter-Insurgency Campaigns

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Abstract

When Islamic Jihadists conducted terrorist operations against the United States at the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. on September 11, 2001, it shook this nation to its very core. These terrorist actions became a rallying cry for action against world terrorism and part of the justification for military actions against Saddam Hussein and his Iraqi government and occupation of the country. Previous to this occurrence in our history, a similar action occurred when the USS Maine exploded in Havana Harbor, Cuba, on 15 February 1898 and was used as a springboard for military action and occupation of Cuba during the Spanish-American War. History provides us with valuable lessons; since we cannot change what has happened in the past, we must use history and lessons learned to change the future.

Core Reasons for Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF)

The invasion of Iraq during OIF was partially an action based on the terrorist actions of September 11, 2001 but certainly there were many more reasons to justify the invasion. The United States had invaded Iraq before, during Operations Desert Shield/Storm and defeated Saddam Hussein's Army, but the Iraqi leader was left in power after the subsequent withdrawal of American troops when a cease-fire terminated the Gulf War on April 11, 1991. "The United States and its allies maintained a policy of 'containment' towards Iraq." (Wikipedia, 2009). This included numerous and crushing economic sanctions, United States and United Kingdom's enforcement of Iraq no-fly zones to protect Kurds in northern Iraq and Shias in the south, and ongoing inspections to prevent Iraqi development of chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons. Stories of Saddam's humanitarian crimes against his people continued, as did the suspicion that Iraq was pursuing to amass weapons of mass destruction.

When George W. Bush was elected U. S. President in 2000, the country moved towards a move active regime change in Iraq. The Republican Party platform in the 2000 election actively called for the removal of Saddam Hussein, as did key Bush advisors. But despite this platform, not much was happening to take actions to remove Hussein until the September 11, 2001 attacks. After the attacks, which energized the United States's War on Terrorism and the invasion of Iraq, Bush officials claimed, "we're fighting them over there so we don't have to fight them here" (Byman, 2008. para. 7).

Another United States interest in the Persian Gulf and Iraq was the critical role that oil played. According to Posen (2008) "the interest of the United States in oil is not to control it in order to affect price or gain profit but to ensure that potential adversaries do not control it and

use the profits and power to harm others". Other political reasons are to ensure that oil remains available and that its production does not become monopolized by one or two states, which was one of the reasons Iraq's occupation of Kuwait was unacceptable. Additionally, it was clear that Iraq's support of Al Qaeda under Saddam Hussein's regime meant that it was very possible that oil was adding to the funding of terrorism.

An additional United States interest in Iraq was the creation of a functioning democracy. Through democracy it is hoped that the energies of Iraqi youth could be funneled away from terrorism into peaceful venues. Analysts argue that "A functioning democracy in Iraq will somehow produce democratic changes in neighboring countries - ensuring that they too will direct the political energies of their young people into peaceful pursuits" (Posen, 2008. para. 16).

Core Reasons for War in Cuba

The Spanish-American War, April 21 - August 13, 1898, was a turning point in the history of the United States in which the country emerged as a world power. A portion of this short war was fought in Cuba - the United States had a long history of interest and involvement in Cuba. In 1848 President James K. Polk tried to buy Cuba for \$100 million but Spain refused. After that, southern planters began to create and fund private militias, called filibusters, to invade Cuba or to induce the federal government to purchase the island from Spain in the hopes of expanding their agricultural, slave system into the Caribbean.

After several failed attempts by militias to invade the island, southerners still dreamed of integrating Cuba, with its plantations and sugar trade into their agricultural economy. In 1854, President Franklin Pierce, adamant about acquiring the island, declared that the United States would be willing to pay Spain up to \$120 million, however, if Spain refused then the United

States was justified to simply take it. This plan was attacked by abolitionists as part of the southern slave conspiracy and with the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860 the plan was dead.

After the Civil War, Americans saw new opportunities in Cuba. In the late 1860's, America backed the Cubans in their fight for liberation from Spain, hoping that with Spain out of the way, they could dominate the island. The first Cuban insurrection was unsuccessful and lasted between 1868 and 1878. The second bid for independence began in April 1895. Over 100,000 Cubans died as a result of the fighting and starvation. Public outrage and the press put pressure on Presidents Grover Cleveland and William McKinley to end the fighting in Cuba. Washington became concerned for the safety of Americans in the country and on January 24, 1898 the battleship USS Maine was sent from Key West, Florida to Havana, after clearing the visit with the reluctant government in Madrid.

On the evening of February 15, 1898 terrible explosions ripped the Maine apart, killing 266 sailors. The United States Navy Department immediately formed a board of inquiry in Havana to determine the cause of the Maine's destruction and after four weeks concluded that a mine had detonated under the ship. The board did not fix blame for the placement of the device.

When the Navy's verdict was announced, the American public reacted with outrage. Condemning articles in the press blaming Spain fueled what the public had already fixed on Spain. The Spanish position on Cuban independence hardened, and President McKinley asked permission from Congress to intervene. On April 21 the Navy began a blockade of Cuba and Spain followed with a declaration of war on April 23.

"The destruction of the Maine did not cause the United States to declare war on Spain, but it served as a catalyst, accelerating the approach to a diplomatic impasse." (US Navy, 2003. para.

10) Additionally, the sinking of the ship and the deaths of 266 sailors brought public support to armed intervention.

On December 10, 1898, Spain and the United States signed the Treaty of Paris and in accordance with the treaty, Puerto Rico was given to the United States and Spain renounced all rights to Cuba and it remained under military occupation by the United States. The treaty ended Spain's Empire in the Americas and was the beginning of United States dominance in the region. Congress's war resolutions included a promise not to annex Cuba and in 1901, the Platt Amendment was passed in which the United States retained extensive controls over Cuba's government and had the right to intervene if order broke down. United States occupation of the island ended the following year when Cuba was granted independence. The United States built a naval base in Guantanamo Bay while American investment in sugar, mining, tobacco, cattle ranching, transportation and utilities continued to grow. This economic assault coupled with the Cuban "puppet leaders" caused angry Cuban nationalists to revolt in September 1906 after an allegedly rigged election. American troops were again sent to the island on September 29, 1906 by President Teddy Roosevelt under the provisions of the Platt Amendment to crush the uprising and restore order. Cuba remained a client of the United States until January 1, 1959 when Fidel Castro's revolution ended over a half century of American imperialism on the island.

Successes and Failures of Operation Iraqi Freedom

The falling statue of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad remains an image of the United States led military forces overwhelming military success against the Iraqi Army. The swift march through Iraq to Baghdad, with little resistance and minimal casualties were a tribute to American military dominance. The regime of Saddam Hussein was ended, and with that the ability of the regime to deploy weapons of mass destruction.

While terrorism in Iraq is not completely eliminated, Al Qaeda in Iraq is certainly on the run. The invasion of Iraq by the United States led coalition forces initially became a lifeline for Al Qaeda recruiting. Now Sunni tribes and Iraqi citizens are killing or arresting Al Qaeda members and transforming parts of Iraq from sanctuaries of terrorism to hunting grounds.

Iraqi oil fields, the second largest oil reserves in the world are secure. The United States is helping to build and rebuild Iraqi infrastructure, with power stations, schools, hospitals, sewer lines, police stations and more. The United States also had established military bases in the strategic heart of the world and has built the world's largest embassy in Baghdad that employs 5,000 people. Iraqi police and security forces are being trained and given more and more responsibility at maintaining the security of the country.

Representative government in Iraq was impossible as long as Saddam Hussein ruled. When military action removed him from power, it made it possible for the Iraqi people to have a chance at democracy. According to Spring (2003), "the responsibility for a more democratic government in Iraq is with the Iraqi people and beyond the scope of the responsibilities of United States and coalition military forces".

The swiftness of military victory was not without consequence. In the days after the fall of Baghdad, it was apparent that there was no plan in place to establish government institutions or infrastructure. The Iraqi people rioted and then began fighting amongst themselves, as Sunnis, Kurds and Shiites were unable to agree to share political and military power with one another, a problem that has plagued them for hundreds of years. These three divided, groups, with strong identities, will not be easy to democratize. Posen (2006) says, "Minorities fear the tyranny of the majority, and majorities have a hard time avoiding the temptation to tyrannize."

As mentioned previously, the military invasion fueled support for Al Qaeda, and initially not only did angry Iraqis join the ranks, but young radicals from other Middle Eastern countries and Europe flocked to Iraq to fight the United States. "Fighters who went to Iraq learned a new set of capabilities that are now dispersed to the far corners of the earth. Techniques like checkpoint evasion, urban warfare, and particularly the use of sophisticated IEDs and suicide bombing all are now part of the arsenal of salafi-jihadists elsewhere." (Byman, 2003)

Successes and Failures in Cuba

United States military actions in Cuba in 1898 and again in 1906 were both swift and decisive. The Spanish-American War only lasted a little over four months in 1898, with a treaty of Paris signed with Spain in December of that year. The United States gained Puerto Rico and established a military naval base at Guantanamo Bay as a result of the treaty, and Cuba was finally granted formal independence in 1902, though under the provisions of the Platt Amendment, the United States reserved the right to intervene in Cuban political, economic and military affairs if necessary.

United States companies made huge economic investments in Cuban businesses, such as sugar, tobacco, mining, cattle ranching and utilities and also purchased large amounts of Cuban real estate. As an example, by 1926 American companies owned 60% of the Cuban sugar industry and imported 95% of the Cuban crop.

The Platt Amendment provisions were bitterly resented by the majority of Cubans. Some Cubans also felt that though they were freed from Spanish imperialism, that they only fell under the same with the Americans because of the vast economic penetration and the perception that Cuban leaders were puppets to American businessmen. This lack of trust and loathing of the

perceived American imperialism fueled the successful revolution that Fidel Castro would later lead.

Similarities of the Campaigns

Both campaigns were fueled with public support from anger at actions against the country. Actions to liberate Cuba were driven by the outrage that the American public felt when the USS Maine exploded in Havana Harbor. The blame, right or wrong, was put on Spain and perceived as an act of aggression against a United States warship. The actions to liberate Iraq from the rule of Saddam Hussein's regime was driven by the outrage that the American public felt when terrorists attacked the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. The blame here, right or wrong, was put on Iraq as supporting the terrorist network who were the masterminds of the attacks and for developing weapons of mass destruction.

In both campaigns, the President made speeches to the American people prior to the military action that was a prelude and justification for aggression to liberate the people of Cuba and Iraq from tyranny. Also in both campaigns, the media played a major role in supporting these actions, Pulitzer and Hearst Publications in Cuba and Fox News and CNN in Iraq.

In both campaigns, military actions by the United States were swift and decisive. In both campaigns, the United States military became an occupying force and in both campaigns, there was public resentment to occupation. Though, there was armed resistance in both campaigns after the fact, the revolt in Cuba in 1906 was subdued far more easily than has been the case in Iraq.

In both campaigns the United States has established strategic military bases. Also, in both campaigns the occupied countries lost trust in the United States, partially due to a perception that the motive for military action was not for the independence of the country from tyranny, but for

the possession of natural resources that the countries had. In Cuba it was for new markets and sources for raw materials, and in Iraq for the oil reserves.

In both Cuba, in 1898, and Iraq in 2003, after military actions were completed by the United States to liberate the countries, they were determined by the United States to be incapable of self-rule. Moreover, in both instances there have been accusations that the governing bodies put in place are "puppets" of the occupiers.

Differences of the Campaigns

Though it is yet to be seen in Iraq, the attempt by the United States to establish a democracy in Cuba ended in 1959 when Fidel Castro's revolution made Cuba a communist country. The loss of trust in the United States that stemmed back to the turn of the century was a major reason for the revolt. In Cuba, American businessmen looked to profit at the expense of the Cuban people by controlling the majority of their major exports. This is different that what is occurring in Iraq as the United States is not attempting to own Iraqi oil, only to ensure that it is available and that profits that the Iraqi people gain from the sale of oil are not used to fund terrorist actions.

Another difference in the campaigns is that the United States seems genuine in its interest in rebuilding Iraqi infrastructure and providing humanitarian relief to the people of Iraq, where in Cuba, if it did not provide profit, it was not acted on. The United States is also actively training the Iraqis to provide there own security by providing mentor's for both police and military personnel.

The lack to do these things attributed to the loss of Cuba's trust and appears to be a lesson learned by the United States. It may possibly be part of the reason that the Iraqi people turned on Al Qaeda.

Repeated Mistakes/Lessons Learned

The swift military dominance in both campaigns resulted in the same situation; when the leaders of the country were removed from power, both Cuba and Iraq were incapable of self-rule and the United States was forced to occupy the countries militarily to keep order. In Cuba, this situation attributed to resentment by the people to revolt against the forced democracy and eventually led to a communist government. This is yet to be seen in Iraq, but the longer that the United States maintains a military occupation, the more resentment that will be directed to the occupiers and their ways.

Also, in both cases, the events that triggered military action - the sinking of the USS Maine in Cuba; and in Iraq that they were funding the terrorists that conducted the acts of September 11, 2001 and were developing and stockpiling weapons of mass destruction, are suspect. The USS Maine it is now determined, most likely blew up due to a fire in the garrison where the gunpowder was stored. In addition, there has been no direct evidence that has tied Saddam Hussein's regime to funding Al Qaeda or weapons of mass destruction found in Iraq. In both these cases, the media assisted in raising the level of public support to go to war.

There is evidence though that the United States has learned lessons from the past. In Iraq, we are earnestly rebuilding infrastructure that should assist in gaining the support of the people. We are also training police and military personnel so that we can eventually draw down our military forces and they can keep order themselves. We are attempting to establish Iraq as a democratic state and we know from history that this will take time. With the differences and mistrust of the Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds, all factions will need to be represented in order for democracy to have a chance.

Conclusion

History does teach lessons and sometimes battles and campaigns have many, many similarities. Sometimes it is difficult not to repeat mistakes made in similar campaigns, as has happened in Cuba and Iraq with a long-term military occupation. However, we have learned that we will need to gain the support and trust of the people in order for a democracy to work in Iraq. With patience and the will to stay the course, we should be able to achieve this goal and make better changes for the future.

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