

Running Head: MILITARY OPERATIONS AND CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

Military Operations and the Failure to Achieve Cultural Understanding

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Abstract

Failing to achieve cultural understanding has shown to be counterproductive to the success of military operations. Past military operations have resulted in failure or experienced difficulties due to the neglect of cultural understandings of the local populace. As technology and tactics change the cultural understanding of people remain as an important objective to achieve success. Understanding the results of past operations can assist in increased awareness and training to improve the military for success in future situations. Examples of past failures during armed military operations in Cuba and the Philippines will be compared to the successes during recent operations in Iraq.

Experiences and lessons learned from past United States military occupations and operations can be directly compared to current situations experienced in Iraq. With knowledge of history leaders can apply experiences and actions towards decisions that can compliment military action as well as provide peace and stability in foreign conflicts.

The beginning of the United States occupation of Cuba was on January 1 1899. The military's occupation policies were based upon the principals of international law and General Order 100 of 1863. An occupier had a moral obligation to protect the people from undue hardships and to provide them with basic governmental services. United States military in Cuba was held to operate in accordance with the Teller Amendment. The amendment ensured the United States could not annex Cuba but intended to leave control of the island to the people. General John R. Brooke established a military government on the island. Under Brooke's supervision some services were restored namely infrastructure, health agencies, and postal services. The second period of administration was under General Leonard Wood. Wood led many reconstruction programs in Cuba. One of Wood's focuses was the eradication of malaria and yellow fever. Many programs for education and public works were established and provided well for the people of Cuba.

In 1900 electoral law was passed establishing the Cuban people to elect officials at the municipal level and soon after a constitution was drafted. The United States approved the constitution with acceptance of a series of clauses to maintain influence on an independent Cuba. United States secretary of war Elihu Root prepared these clauses which became known as the Platt Amendment. The details of Platt Amendment restricted Cuba in decisions of treaties that would impair its sovereignty or contract debts not repayable by normal revenues. The country of Cuba would also accept the state of the military government and grant permission for the

purchase or lease of lands for coaling and military bases. The United States would also be granted special privileges to intervene in the preservation of the Cuban people.

The effects of the Platt Amendment were a restriction upon Cuban self-determination and a tremendous humiliation for the Cuban people. Much of the reconstitution programs were abandoned regardless of the merits as cultural barriers from both the Army and the people failed to conform to each other. “The Army had unwittingly contributed to the shallowness of the institutions it planted in Cuba, for its top-down management style had given the indigenous population very little say over fundamental policy decisions” (Birtle, 107).

The United States military occupation of the Philippines posed a more difficult challenge unlike the occupation of Cuba. Terrain and tensions among tribal and religious groups created a more hostile environment to operate within. In December of 1898 the Army controlled the colony’s capital city of Manila. The archipelago of 7,000 islands was dominated by Filipino revolutionaries who refused to acknowledge American authority over the islands. In February of 1899 revolutionaries under the leadership of Emilio Aguinaldo surrounded the city of Manila and fighting erupted in and around the city marking the start of The Philippine War.

Starting initially as a conventional war soon turned to guerrilla warfare as MG. Elwell Otis and the Army forced Aguinaldo and his forces into the mountains. The terrain favored the Filipino guerrillas providing them an upper hand over the American commanders and keeping them off balance.

Military victory was not the goal of Filipino leaders. Their goals were harassment of military forces in hopes of undermining America’s will and timing their offensives to influence public opinion of McKinley for the November 1900 U.S. presidential election.

GEN. Otis acting on directives of President McKinley to “win the confidence, respect, and admiration of the inhabitants of the Philippines” led to the opening of schools, construction of roads, and refurbishment of public facilities across the Philippines. These pacification programs placed heavy burdens on the commanders conducting administrative and operational duties. Short of additional staff to oversee local governments and civil affairs actions many programs suffered.

In a move to enhance the appeal of American rule the McKinley administration replaced the military government with a civilian one. By mid-1901 full civilian government was instituted when William H. Taft assumed the post of governor general. Army officers felt deep resentment to the civilian government and seen this as premature in how it complicated operations and added a new layer of bureaucracy.

Officers in the field began to pressure authorities in Manila to shift towards more repressive forms of pacification. Some officers felt the people regarded American leniency as weakness and hailed the guerrillas’ abilities to fight their foes. Gen. MacArthur answered with the proclamation that officially put into effect sections of General Order 100 authorizing stern measures against guerrillas and civilian insurgents. “The clear thrust of these programs was to give commanders in the field the tools they needed to strike not at the guerrillas in the field, who were kept at bay by the Army’s vigorous initiatives, but at the clandestine infrastructure that lay at the heart of the insurrection” (Birtle, 129).

Gen. MacArthur with 70,000 veterans launched an offensive targeting the senior leadership of the insurgents. The number of arrests and executions increased. As did the amount of property destruction in willingness to burn barrios associated with the insurrection.

The task of bringing the war to a close fell upon General Chaffee. Chaffee assigned General Bell to overcome the guerrilla army in Batangas and Brigadier General Smith to the island of Samar. Both led vicious and destructive methods to accomplish success despite the human suffering. “With the last two major figures of the resistance movement in captivity, the United States declared the Philippine War to be officially over on 4 July 1902” (Birtle 135).

Recent operations in Iraq can show similarities with the actions experienced in past military operations and cultural understanding. An example of success through cultural understanding can be understood by the actions of Task Force Baghdad’s campaign to “win the peace”.

Many of the outlying areas of Baghdad suffered severe crime, poverty, and instability. A condition fostered from the former Saddam Hussein leadership and Muqtada Al Sadr. These areas provided insurgents with a safe haven and areas to recruit and influence from. In order to create security and convince the people of the good intentions of the military, work was started towards establishing a sustainable infrastructure. Investing in the local population with providing stable electricity, functioning sewage systems, and fresh water would provide work and a sense of ownership for the people. “The extraordinary effort by the leaders and Soldiers of Task Force Baghdad to synchronize the elements needed to implement the “first mile” projects within Sadr City were to pay big dividends not only to the people of Sadr City , but to the force protection of the soldiers of Task Force Baghdad” (Chiarelli, Michaelis).

Muqtada Al Sadr’s forces attacked once visible signs of improvement were being made. Repairs to the infrastructure stopped and violence escalated. The resilience of the U.S. forces and the people prevailed.

The continued successes of defeating the insurgent forces and training the Iraqi military and police force were also significant contributions to the people in providing purpose for their own country. Using local contractors to hire labors to complete the projects provided a much needed sense of ownership that fostered a safe and healthy operating space.

After ten weeks of intense fighting Muqtada Al Sadr's forces conceded. "One hundred sixty-nine soldiers lost their lives, and over 1900 were seriously injured in moving Baghdad toward sovereignty" (Chiarelli, Michaelis).

The importance of cultural understanding and how it has been employed in past operations as well as how it applies to our current operations can educate military leaders and act as a force multiplier. The experiences of past leaders greatly assist in our changing environment. Technology of weapons and equipment will continually change but history shows that the will of the people and how their culture impacts military operations will always be a significant part of military success or failure. It is through the knowledge of the past that will provide critical thinking that will allow current and future leaders to shift the traditional conventional combat operations mindset and adapt to the changing strategic environment.

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