

Argumentative Essay

“Philippine Insurrection and Operation Iraqi Freedom”

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to compare and contrast the U.S. counter-insurgency operations in the Philippine Insurrection (1898-1902) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (2003 -Present). The military operations, problem sets, and style of warfare encountered during Operation Iraqi Freedom are not new. In fact, the American Soldier has faced these same elements and obstacles in many previous conflicts – to include the conflicts in Vietnam, Korea and the Philippines.

This paper will compare and contrast the U.S. counterinsurgency operations between Philippine Insurrection (1898-1902) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (2003-Present). As these two wars are separated by more than one hundred years, they are also geographically, culturally, and politically individually distinct enough that the casual observer would think they would have little in common. However, the military operations conducted, problem sets encountered, and styles of warfare encountered during Operation Iraqi Freedom are far from new. The American Soldier has faced these same elements and obstacles of this war as they have in many previous conflicts. The American Soldier has fought insurgent guerilla warfare and in the Philippines, Korea, Vietnam, and now in Afghanistan and Iraq.

When U.S. forces liberate a people from an oppressive regime in a foreign land, they often times are confronted with guerrilla warfare and an insurgency to deal with. While a large portion of the population will work with the Soldiers, the provisional authorities and the international aid workers to assist in laying the foundation for a democratic society, insurgents will wage a determined campaign of terror against them. To prevail, the U.S. military must develop an effective counter-insurgency strategy. (Philippine-American War, Wikipedia, pg 2) By the previous paragraph you would think that we are discussing Operation Iraqi Freedom. But it can be applied to any number of wars. One of those wars includes one that was fought at the turn of the century, that war was the Philippine Insurrection. As you can see history offers several precedents on how to conduct operations other than war while simultaneously waging battle against insurgency operations.

Although history never quite repeats itself, current events often resemble earlier occasions so closely there is a temptation to draw lessons from them. Imagine a time when America found itself in a war in a foreign land, fighting a foreign foe whose strategy it was to inflict a constant rate of loss on the Army and leverage anti-war media with stories of atrocity. Imagine a time when elected officials and US commanders expected a quick war against a corrupt government ruled by a small faction of persons or families, found that they had roused the countryside against them. Imagine a time when the issue of this war was central to an American Presidential election because it caused a split in one of the major parties and planted the seeds for a continued war. Not Iraq – this war was the Philippine-American War and the election of 1912.

The McKinley administration was recorded as saying that the enemy was not the Filipino population rather that it was the Spanish oppressor. They also stated that the objective goal which was sought by the Filipino Republic was a sovereign, independent, socially stable Philippines led by the people. The insurgents were mostly Filipino peasants and their interests differed from their political leaders. The common element that created a bond between the Filipino elite and peasants was opposition to U.S. military forces. They essentially considered the American forces another occupying force and created focus for both groups. The strategy of the Philippine Republic generals was to send home enough body bags to persuade the American government - through mainstream media - to end the war and pull out. (Katz)

This same type of warfare has been ongoing in Iraq since the end of the ground war and matured during subsequent Operation Iraqi Freedom rotations. The insurgency has used the media to capitalize their efforts of Jihad against the occupying

infidel. The attacks on American Soldiers in Iraq have been so horrendous; they include acts such as kidnappings, beheadings, and hit and run attacks. These types of attacks and counterattacks are basic guerrilla warfare, in which a weaker foe attacks at the time and place of his choosing, then melts back into the population group. Guerrilla warfare is designed to compel the larger force into submission through popular opinion and demoralization of purpose of its enemy. The harder an occupying force pounds back, the more it alienates the populace, creating communities that accept, if not actively support, an armed resistance effort.

A first-term Republican American President takes the country to war. He then justifies the invasion and occupation of a sovereign foreign country with a combined focus of the human rights violations and the strategic importance of the area. The opposition to the President claims that he has forced the country into committing an act of aggression on the basis of false or questionable intelligence. While major combat operations are swiftly and decisively concluded in America's favor, with only a handful of casualties and an attendant swell of patriotic pride, U.S. forces are then subsequently dragged into a violent counterinsurgency campaign against an elusive band of insurgents. Predictably, the war becomes a central issue to the American presidential campaign. This sounds strikingly familiar - could it be present day Iraq? Clearly it could also apply to the Philippines a century ago.

The Spanish empire ceded the Philippines to U.S. control in 1898 after losing the war in Cuba. The American military then invaded the Philippines and took the capital of Manila in short order. Then, as now in Baghdad, the troubles began. This is how Max Boot described the follow on conflict in his book *The Savage Wars of Peace*: "Though

successive U.S. generals proclaimed victory at hand, American Soldiers kept dying in ambushes, telegraph lines kept getting cut, and army convoys kept getting attacked."(Boot). This new phase of warfare only angered the Americans into acting more ruthlessly than before. The Americans began taking no prisoners, burning whole villages, and routinely shot surrendering Filipino Soldiers. Civilians were not immune to the violence of action as suspected guerrilla sympathizers were forced into concentration camps. (Philippine-American War, Wikipedia, pg 8)

Over the next three and a half years the U.S. Army lost 4,196 soldiers with another 2,930 wounded until July 1902 when the Filipino guerrillas were finally subdued. By the Army's own estimate, 69,000 Filipino combatants were killed along with nearly 200,000 civilians. Though the American war effort was marked by burning, pillaging, and torturing, the commanders finally achieved victory through a strategy of isolating the guerrillas. They did this by forcing the civilian population out of towns and into what they referred to as "protected zones" and able-bodied men found outside the zones without a pass were arrested or shot. (Gates)

Despite efforts of the U.S. forces, sporadic uprisings continued long after 1902. Because of these uprisings, the occupation was forced to remain for the next 40 plus years. Hopefully victory in Iraq won't require the same strategy or timetable. There is another unfortunate aspect to the Philippines parallel. Much of the resistance was led by "Moors" who were Muslims. American politicians created support for the war by painting it as a Christian crusade. President William McKinley's official proclamation ending the Spanish-American War of 1898 declared his goal in the Philippines as one of "benevolent assimilation." The problem was that many Filipinos didn't want to be

assimilated. McKinley later told a group of Methodist missionaries how he formulated this goal. He stated "I went down on my knees and prayed to Almighty God for light and guidance more than one night. And one night late it came to me this way ... that there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all and to educate the Filipinos and uplift them and Civilize and Christianize them". (Blount)

The most notable way that these two wars differ relates to the motivation of the insurgent groups. The insurgents in the Philippine war had a clearly defined political agenda that they marketed to their fellow citizens. Rebel commanders distributed public letters arguing their case, appealing to sentiments of patriotism, nationalism, and self-sovereignty. Their message was that the Philippines should be ruled by Filipinos, without interference from an unelected colonial government. By contrast, in the war in Iraq, it is America that is trying to build an Iraq that is governed by Iraqis, while it is insurgents who wish to empower an unelected minority tyrant over the majority. That is why there is no political wing to the insurgency in this country. Their cause is hidden and its only recognition is the useless violence. The most uncommon feature of this insurgency is its refusal to set up standards of normal combat before the world. So, faced with such graphic and destructive force as this form of terrorism, the United States has an ideological advantage. In the Iraqi counterinsurgency, a great deal of history remains to be written.

History can be a valuable asset in the planning and decision making process. Leaders can use the lessons learned from military history combined with current information and analysis to achieve success. In Iraq, during the initial years of Operation Iraqi Freedom had leaders reviewed past conflicts and had not issued orders

which caused the systematic widespread mistreatment and occasional torture of thousands of Iraqi detainees under our control; understood the complexities and defined requirements of “winning” the counter insurgency fight in Iraq; secured the population centers by instilling the authority of Iraqi Army and Iraq National Police which provides for security and allows civil capacity to be forged; gained support and cooperation of our allies (allowed the Secretary of State to take the lead instead of the Pentagon); had we more effectively engaged Iraq’s neighbors (in particular the Saudis, Kuwaitis, Jordanians, and the Turks) the insurgency would not have been effective or may have been avoided (McCaffery). In the Philippines the mission was to “win the confidence, respect, and admiration of the inhabitants of the Philippines” and in the modern Iraq counter-insurgency the goal has changed in wording but still is similar enough to draw parallels from as we attempt to “achieve a strategic transition with honor and success” with the country and people of Iraq.

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