

Running Head: Why Study Military History?

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Abstract

Although military leaders are busy today, the study of military history is vital if we do not want to repeat the mistakes of the past. For the Army to be successful in Iraq, they must apply the lessons learned from the Army's experiences during the Pacification mission in Vietnam, the war against Aguinaldo's Army of Liberation in the Philippines, and our nation building efforts in Cuba. The overwhelming lesson to learn from our experiences is that having the strongest Army in the war is not enough. There must be a willing political effort behind the military to win an insurgent war.

Introduction

The study of military history is vital if we do not want to repeat the mistakes of the past. The study of military history can be defined as why one side wins and another side loses a war, the role of discipline and leadership, bravery, the national will, and determining a war's outcome and consequences. This essay will outline three examples from military history that our Army learned from and how those learned lessons have been applied to today's Army and the War of Terrorism.

Pacification in Vietnam

Vietnam, more than any other experience in the United States Army history, can be directly compared to the present situation in Iraq. When General Creighton Abrams became the MACV Commander in 1968, he faced the same situation as the Army is facing today. After the Tet Offensive, General Abrams seized the opportunity to make gains in the pacification of the rural areas in Vietnam.

General Abrams faced pressure from Washington to reduce the number of casualties and work to gain a strong position for the military in order to set the conditions for an honorable exit from Vietnam. These political pressures are the same pressures the commander in Iraq faces today.

General Abrams strategy was to improve the capabilities and performance of the South Vietnamese Army. As South Vietnam's Army became more capable of assuming the responsibility for most of the combat operations, American forces would slowly withdraw. The strategy today is the same. The techniques we are using in Iraq are Transitional Training Teams.

Under General Abrams command, United States advisors grew from 108 to 2,243 during his first year of command (American Military History).

Because of General Abrams directives and financial aid from the United States government, the South Vietnamese Army became one of the largest, most heavily equipped armies in the world. The number of soldiers increased from 850,000 in 1968 to over a million in just two years (American Military History).

An army winning on the battlefield is not enough to be successful in rebuilding a nation. The lesson learned is that the most capable army in the world cannot succeed if it does not have the political backing of their government. It is also true that the host nation's government must be capable of self-governing its people and directing its military capabilities. Our Army is experiencing the same scenario in Iraq.

Philippines Experiences

Although not the same situation as it is in Iraq today, we can also draw parallels between the Philippine-American War and Operation Iraq Freedom. When the war started, both the Americans and the Filipinos shared the common interest of defeating Spain. As the campaign continued, however, relations between both sides quickly deteriorated. The main reason for the deterioration was that the Filipinos wanted independence as quickly as possible (Birtle). The Americans initially supported their cause, but began considering keeping the islands for their own purposes.

When the Americans won control of Manila on 13 August 1898, they shut out Aguinaldo's Army. In the fall of 1898, a peace treaty was signed in Paris giving America

control of the Philippines for 20 million dollars (Birtle). The Americans suddenly found themselves as an occupying colonial power half way around the world.

It did not take long for hostilities to start between the American Army and Aguinaldo's Army of Liberation. The insurgent war started on 4 February 1899, just after the United States Congress ratified the Treaty of Paris and took control of the Philippines.

Similar to the insurgent forces in Iraq today, Aguinaldo's Army was undisciplined, untrained, under equipped, and poorly led. By contrast, the American Army was a professional, well-trained force.

Although Aguinaldo's Army suffered heavy losses at the start of the war, they remained in the field and blended in with the civilian population. Following Aguinaldo's orders, his army changed from conventional tactics to guerrilla warfare tactics (Birtle). As is the strategy of the terrorist in Iraq today, the Filipinos did not fight to achieve battlefield victories against the Americans. Instead, they hoped to undermine and harass the Americans until they no longer had the will to fight. They realized that the American public did not approve of the imperial venture halfway around the world.

The Americans adopted a strategy that General Petraus is using today during the surge in Iraq. They stationed forces in the villages to protect the local population against intimidation from the guerrillas. This also gave the Americans a forward presence. This strategy kept the guerrillas on the run and hampered their ability to conduct operations.

Military efforts were not the only way the Army attempted to fight the guerrillas. They built schools, roads, and the general infrastructure of the country. They also improved the health and sanitation conditions of the country. One by one, Filipino leaders put down their arms and joined the new productive society.

We can make strong comparisons between the insurgent war in the Philippines and the insurgents in Operation Iraqi Freedom. In the Philippines, winning the hearts and minds of the population and utilizing the skills of the local leaders helped end the insurgency. Today, the Army is utilizing the same tactics, techniques, and procedures they used in the Philippines. The Army's experiences in the Philippines can be directly applied to help solve the current situation in Iraq.

The Military Government in Cuba

Cuba and the military government in Cuba from 1898 to 1902 was an experience that the Army can apply the lessons learned toward the current situation in Iraq. When General Brooke took command of Cuba in January 1899, the island was in shambles (Birtle). Just as was the case in the Philippines, the insurgents outnumbered the American Army. General Brookes began rebuilding the country by building roads, schools, and infrastructure. The Army also improved the sanitation and health services of the country.

As part of an effort to include the local leaders in the rebuilding process, General Brookes insured that Cubans headed most of the governmental agencies with the assistances of United States Military or civilian personnel (Birtle). Between 1900 and 1902, the American government spent 15 million dollars on repairing and building roads, expanding harbors, and reestablishing the country infrastructure (Birtle). The results of these programs were a decrease in unemployment and an improvement in the overall economic welfare of the island.

Most of the efforts to rebuild the Cuban nation resulted in failure. The military failed to respect the national culture of the Cuban people and their traditions. They attempted to give the new governmental programs and initiatives an American favor (Birtle). When the programs

failed to give their intended results, the military began to consolidate power at the central government in an effort to make sure they were executed correctly (Birtle).

The lessons learned in Cuba are definitively being applied in Iraq today. The American military leadership in Iraq today realizes that the social programs, governmental initiatives, and changes have no chance of working without considering the Iraqi culture or having changes in their culture. The difference between the Army's experience in Iraq and Cuba is time and support. In Cuba, the Army knew that they did not have time for their programs to be fully implemented by the Cuban people. In Iraq, the Army realizes that without the support of the Iraqi people and their government, they will not be successful. The Army also realizes that our government is fully committed to success in Iraq.

Summary

Although each experience was different, the experiences and lessons learned in Vietnam, the Philippines, and Cuba are being utilized in Iraq today. We can make comparisons to the insurgency in Iraq and the guerillas in Vietnam and the Philippines. Both use similar tactics and strategies. Our experiences with nation building in Cuba can also be applied to the new Iraqi government.

These three experiences show why Army Leaders should take the time to study history. They also show that by learning about the past, we can train our soldiers for future challenges. More importantly, by studying the past, we can apply the lessons learned to our future challenges.

Conclusion

“Because of the uncertainties and diversity of the modern battlefield, the Army is constantly learning and adapting its doctrine” (Charles and Valrie). By studying military history, we can learn from our mistakes and successes. The Army uses the after action review process to capture lessons learned after training events or missions. This data is captured by the Center for Army Lessons Learned, which updates tactical, techniques, and procedures, so the entire army can apply the lesson to their operations.

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