

Running Head: OEF vs OIF

Comparing the parallels between Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom

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SMNRC Class 35

MOS 25 B

August 15, 2009

Abstract

Military leaders today must continually educate themselves on the prospect of the next conflict or war that United States will encounter. Past conflicts elude a pattern of stability throughout the world. No other time like now, has the Armed Forces been stretched to the limits of its manpower. Our Coalition partners have decided to leave the fight to us. More than a decade after that infamous day in September when the world was changed forever, the United States will hopefully be able depart a country leaving it better than when we arrived. But then what? Each conflict is a prelude for the next big thing. If not Korea, then Iraq, or Afghanistan and still lingering in the midst is Iran.

Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) are two ongoing conflicts that have been a stronghold for the United States. The initial ramp up for OEF was based on eliminating terrorism while the OIF ramp up was based on weapons of mass destruction and the necessity for removing a dictator. The parallels between these two conflicts may not necessarily look similar, but the outcome for both is: stability and a democratic state.

Stringent measures have been put in place along with a platform to begin the drawdown process for United States military to leave Iraq. This process will take approximately two and half years with no boots on the ground December 31, 2011. How much longer will it take for the United States to remove all military assets from Afghanistan? That question is unknown currently, especially with the increase of military representation in Afghanistan over the past 90 days. In order to understand what the armed forces are doing today, we must go back a little over a decade to gain a little history of Afghanistan.

By 1997, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates recognized the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan. Pakistan's role in the Taliban success is controversial, as it is generally believed that several Taliban military victories are directly attributable to armed Pakistani intervention. In 1998, following the terrorist bombings of American embassies in Africa, the United States launched a cruise missile attack on training camps belonging to bin Laden's Al-Qaida organization in Afghanistan. Through the Autumn of 2001, the Taliban continued to pressure the Northern Alliance, often with the aid of Osama bin Laden and his Arab forces. On September 9, 2001, the Northern Alliance leader Ahmad Shah Massoud was mortally wounded in an assassination attempt carried out by two Arab men posing as journalists. This attack was the work of

bin Laden's organization as a possible prelude to the airline hijackings and terrorism in the United States on September 11. The Northern Alliance responded to Massoud's killing with an aerial attack on Kabul the night of September 11. It is now known that the killing of Massoud was coordinated with the terror attacks on the United States which took place on September 11. As the United States assigned blame for the attacks on bin Laden and al-Qaida, plans began to take the fight to al-Qaida and its Taliban sponsors as the first phase of what became known as the Global War on Terror. (www.historyguy.com)

Iraq on the other hand history began in 1990 when Iraq forces invaded Kuwait which led to the Gulf War. After approval for by the King of Saudi to allow more than 200,000 troops to stage in Saudi Arabia, the United States engaged in the largest and most expedient air attack in the history of the military. That was then followed by a massive ground attack. On February 27, 1991, the United States declared victory and sent the Iraqi soldiers retreating into Iraq. (www.desert-storm.com)

Twelve years later, March 20, 2003, Operation Iraqi Freedom is launched on the premises that Saddam Hussein's regime maintained weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and it posed imminent danger to the world. Years later after on-going investigations and speculation, no weapons of mass destruction have ever been found. Although, WMD has not been found, the removal and later execution of one of the most notorious dictators, Saddam Hussein was accomplished.

One additional similarity is al Qaeda. Like Afghanistan, al Qaeda also has a history in Iraq. For the past few years, the United States Army has used Counterinsurgency (COIN) operations to mitigate insurgency penetration. According to FM 3-4, *Counterinsurgency* is

military, paramilitary, political, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency. According to one Special Forces office in Iraq, 2005, "Counterinsurgency is not just thinking man's warfare – it is the graduate level of war.

In the midst of all the problems that are faced with these conflicts, lives were lost. The ultimate sacrifice has been made almost on a daily basis. Whether it has been by the hands of the enemy or friendly forces, death is a part of this profession that will never go away. One thing is for sure, the casualty rate, while it is minute in comparison to the Vietnam War is very troubling. To date, at least 4,332 members of the United States military have died in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom since the war began in 2003. On the flip side, almost 706 United States military members have died in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Uzbekistan as a result of Operation Enduring Freedom. The numbers may be small currently, but they are on the rise since an increase of United States military representation was ordered this year.

In recent times OEF has been compared to the Vietnam War 50 years later. Location change, but the tactics of the enemy are very similar. Since the beginning of the year, there has been an increase of violence in Afghanistan. Some believe that al Qaeda has been actively recruiting new Taliban to support the unrest in Afghanistan. The Secretary of Defense apparently did not like the instability in the region. In June General David McKiernan was removed from the top position in Afghanistan and replaced with General Stanley McChrystal. Senior leadership did not believe progress was not being made to a sufficient level after nearly eight years in that region. (Time.com)

Al Qaeda has embedded themselves in Afghanistan and its neighboring border of Pakistan. The United States must be decisive in the techniques it uses to conquer terrorism and provide stability to the Afghani's. Since General McChrystal coming on board he has steadily

increased the number of military presence developing in the region. He has worked diligently to pursue courses of action to deter Taliban movement throughout Afghanistan entering and exiting via Pakistan borders. With his special operations background, he will more than likely bring in specific skill sets to not only deter al Qaeda penetration but remove it completely.

The increase in COIN operations will most likely occur on the onset after establishing a rapport in the villages of Afghanistan relationships will then be built which will lead to the stabilization of Afghanistan. COIN operations which is tied to Full Spectrum Operations in an overseas of combat like element requires ground forces to be tri-fold: offensive, defensive as well as the stability for an environment. (Nagl, D.)

Some of the coalition services have been successful during this partnership in Afghanistan. Recently, the Canadian troops utilizing their own COIN tactics cleared areas and disrupted the Taliban attempt to attack in Kandahar after implanting themselves in the villages and other hiding locations that the Taliban would usually be. By operating along side Afghanistan security forces and other local civilians they are building the necessary rapport within the community. Additionally, they are promoting the necessary economic development to enable the locals to begin operate independently without relying on the government of support, guidance or security. NATO officials are hoping that the success that has developed in Kandahar will continue to manifest throughout Afghanistan in other locations that are currently occupied by Taliban or al-Qaeda.(Brown, D.)

Fortunately, this past year has seen an extremely decline in violence in Iraq. The Iraqi military and police are gaining their confidence within their organization and their cities are gaining the trust in them. The President of the United States announced his exit strategy for United States troops from Iraq. This plan provides for a responsive drawdown from Iraq by

December, 31, 2011. This plan is formulated by the transition of three major headquarters in Iraq down to one major organization. The merger of Multi-National Forces-Iraq, Multi-National Corps-Iraq and Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq would be renamed to Unified Forces-Iraq effective 1 January 2010. This newly formed Headquarters would provide over watch of this responsive drawdown process from Iraq. It has been mandated that by September 2010 military forces are down to 50,000 personnel with all personnel being completely out of Iraq at the end of 2011.

Responsive drawdown has already seen an shuffle as all convoys and combat troops were no longer in the cities during day after 1 July 2009. The Iraqis were so excited that they made it a national holiday. It could be interpreted that it was like the first stage of their liberation process in a true democratic society.(Rubin, A.)

Many people say that history does not repeat itself. Although it may be another location, some of the same issues are still valid and current as history has shown with past wars and conflicts. Just like in other conflicts, the casualties may not necessarily return home in a timely manner. As with Capt Michael Scott Speicher was plane was shot down the first night of the Gulf War in 1991. Eighteen years later his remains finally turn up in Iraq and are returned back to the United States and to his Family. Although tragic, to finally be able to provide your loved one a final resting place will put an end to years of emotional torture and anguish. (Word, R.)

The other casualties of long term conflicts is the effect that happen to the Service member based on stress and pressure of being in a combat environment for an extended amount of time. In Mach 2004, six Soldiers were charged with torture abuse after photographs Iraqi prisoners held in US custody at the Baghdad Central Detention Center, formerly known as Abu Ghraib Prison were released showing the abuse by the hands of military personnel.

On November 19, 2005, eight US Marines were charged with the deaths of unarmed Iraqi civilians in the Al Anbar town of Haditha. More than 20 Iraqi non-combatant local residents were killed by the Marines during a hunt for a roadside bomber. It was alleged that the Iraqis were massacred by Marines in retribution for an insurgent attack earlier in the day.

Two years after the execution of four Iraqi detainees, three Army Soldiers were convicted of murder. Two of the Soldiers originally were sentenced to life in prison, all three Soldiers were granted clemency. The senior ranking NCO of the group a prior First Sergeant was sentenced to 40 years in prison with a dishonorable discharge and reduced in rank to a private. These killings could possibly demonstrate the side of effects of dealing with detainees and not knowing their capability. Although, these three were clearly executed, no one truly knows what went through the three NCOs minds at the time that they carried out the execution.(Robson, S.). Finally, in May 2009, one NCO who was seeking mental health care snapped and returned to the treatment facility and allegedly murdered four Service members after being thrown out of the facility early that afternoon.

Clearly implications of how conflicts and wars impact personnel or a society can be disturbing. While military personnel take an oath to defend and protect the United States against all enemies, both foreign and domestic, Service members have never seen the amount of conflict time in the past compared to the recent two conflicts with two additional conflicts always lingering. The stress from all of it can take a toll. No matter what, United States will always be there to continue to secure freedom and democracies for a lesser society.

Both Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom have proven that making a democracy is not easy. After years of dictatorship and unsettling spiritual mindset, terrorism is formed. The sense of one individual wanting control is a need and desire to dictate

your very essence. Control is a very powerful and deadly weapon if used counterproductively. That is what Saddam Hussein had done for nearly 24 years in power as the dictator of Iraq.

Afghanistan on the other hand, had been dominated by nearly a decade by the Taliban. Al Qaeda has been a dominant force that controls the very destiny of that country. Although Afghanistan has held elections in the past the democratic process has not truly been established in the traditional sense. As such, there is still a vast amount of corruption and imbalance of power and aid in the country. When the Afghanistan military finally takes back control of their country and are considered viable assets for their society along with other key professionals in the community with Afghanistan rid the Taliban. Only then will stability and democracy be in place.

The lessons learned from these two conflicts should be documented and revisited any time a country begins stirring with minor unrest. Global War on Terrorism has been the centerpiece that justified sending troops and our coalition partners into battle in both countries, but hopefully in the end these countries will become a democratic state full of sovereignty which is stable and secure. Ultimately, the United States cannot save every country.

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